

INDO ASIA DIARIES

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INDO ASIA TOURS

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Tony Deemer

*Of all the things about Ladakh, Christine was hooked to the mirror-flat waters of the Pangong Tso. She travelled to the lake in the northern most state of India in the summer of 1984 and it left an indelible imprint in her mind. Since then, Christine's India trips feature Ladakh and its different towns over other cities. **Some of the most vivid memories in her mind, apart from the Pangong Tso, are the site of red-robed young monks treading to monasteries in the chilly evenings, sipping hot tea from dainty cups with her fingers wrapped around them at small cafes of Leh and the richly coloured local festivals.** One of the greatest attractions of India, Christine believes that the city and its wonders are incomparable to anything that she has seen around the world.*



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PRAYER STONES PILED UP BY THE EDGE OF THE LAKE

Location: Pangong Tso, Ladakh



Dal Lake, Srinagar

While larger water bodies like gurgling rivers and sweeping oceans seem to take up more mind space of travellers, often the placid soothing lakes take a back seat. **But for those who don't like action in the water, and instead like a stellar view of a tranquil water body, lakeside stays are the most ideal holiday option.** With a number of notable lakes in India, one is spoilt for choice. Here are some of the best lake destinations of the country.

Dal Lake, Srinagar

A clutch of wooden houseboats and slim transportation boats slice the still waters of the Dal Lake of Srinagar. Along with the reflection of the mountains and the green weeds that add to the constellation of things to see in the water, there lies a sublime beauty in the calmness of the lake. One can choose to stay in the houseboats that bob on the water or a guesthouse by its edge, where one can wake up to the hushed splash of the oars that propel the shikaras (local small boats) packed with school children, fruits and vegetables or flower sellers.

Lake Pichola, Udaipur

Fringed by a palace, heritage hotels and an ancient havelis, Lake Pichola is one of the dreamiest lakes to wake up to. Udaipur's pride and an unlikely find in the desert state of Rajasthan, the Lake has been a backdrop to romantic holidays and history filled weekends for travellers since centuries. Even James Bond could not resist this spectacular canvas and the film, Octopussy found great inspiration here.

Pangong Tso, Ladakh

The teeth-chattering weather and frozen limbs are easily forgotten when the sun rises over Pangong Tso, one of India's highest altitude lakes. **Luxury and basic campsites make for an adventurous stay close this water-body, which partially lies in China. Stay awake at night to shoot the star streaks and watch the colours of the water**



Vembanad Lake

change with the light in one of the most stunning lakes of India.

Vembanad Lake

Kerala- Strung along the sprawling mass of water of Vembanad Lake are high-end hotels, simple villages and rows of coconut trees. The lake touches both Alleppey and Kumarakom districts. Here, comfy houseboats ply guests for short and overnight trips so they can get a glimpse of local life around the water immerse themselves in the stunning environs of the location.

Bhimtal, Uttarakhand

The most coveted lake side retreats of Uttarakhand lie at the edge of the Bhimtal Lake in the northern state of Uttarakhand. Homes and hotels fashioned from inspiration from hill-architecture stand by its edge, making ideal pads to stay for a couple of nights. These are the perfect springboards to see local village life around, visit ancient temples and participate in water sports in the lake.

CROSSING CULTURES

THE BEST DESTINATIONS FOR A LAKE-HINGED STAY

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THE ULTIMATE TRAVELING CAMP

Ladakh

Even as the magnificent destinations and majestic décor take you back to a simpler time, no modern comfort will be missed. Ultimate Travelling Camp offers you a chance to get to know your destination better, learn about the local ecology and the efforts to preserve it, and even exchange a few friendly words and smiles with the local residents.

Highlights include:

- Relive the Glamping legacy of the British Raj
- 24 hour security at Camp
- In-House Restaurant with multi-cuisine menu
- Organic Garden
- 3 water bodies with wooden decks
- Archery and Croquet
- Free Wi-Fi Access at Reception Tent
- In-house Library
- Boutique shop
- In-House Excursion Specialist & Guest Relations Executive
- Each tent has a private terrace
- Specially designed ayurvedic toiletries
- Private Butler Service



TOP SPOT



SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Footloose in Ladakh

Following the thrum of life in Ladakh

If it wasn't for a writing assignment that our editor, Supriya Sehgal's tickets were booked for, she would have delayed her long awaited trip to Ladakh. The thrill of visiting a place that has long been on the bucket list has a different excitement to it. The moment she stepped on Leh's streets, she knew it would be a place that she was going to fall in love with. On her fortnight long trip, she took time to peek into narrow lanes of the old part of the city, camp by the Pangong Tso lake and dig into local food. Here are some of the top recommendations for guests visiting Ladakh.

Khardungla Pass

If you ever wanted to peek down the highest mountain in the world, this would be your easiest chance. **The Khardungla Pass is the highest civilian motor road in the world. A number of bikers and cyclists make this journey treading on the tough roads of the region.** The rest, reach by cars. Do not forget to dig into some soupy Maggi noodles and black tea and use the photo opportunity to click a picture with a milestone that announces that you're on the highest pass.



Leh Palace

Hundar sand dunes

If you thought that Rajasthan is the only place where you could spot a camel, you're in for a surprise. **The Hundar sand dunes in the Nubra Valley region are well known for a small population of Bactrian double humped camels that roam the undulating dunes.** This makes for a stunning backdrop for sunset photographs.



Hemis Monastery

Hemis Monastery

Monasteries are abundant in the Ladakh region. Some of them date back to centuries and are keepers of religious texts and learnings. **Of these, the Hemis Monastery close to Leh, the capital, is one of the most famous ones. The Hemis Monastery festival is held in early July every year, where monks perform masked dances and chant.** The courtyard is crammed with locals and travellers alike, who sit mesmerized watching the fluid movements of the monks.

Leh Palace

If history is a veritable part of your journey, then make a trip to the ancient Leh Palace that was built by the Namgyal King in the 17th century. **The palace is 9 stories high but lies in characterful ruins. Stand atop for a panoramic view of the Stok Kangri and Zaskar ranges in the far distance from the Indus Valley.**

Rafting in the Zaskar River

Adventure lovers will love the frothy, raging Zaskar River that is one of the most scenic and thrilling rafting options in the country, with several levels of rapids. One gets the opportunity to see the idyllic surroundings as you bump down the river to the base point. The expeditions on the river can be customized to suit time and adventure quotient.



Rafting in the Zaskar River

TOP SPOT

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Ayana Fort Kochi opens doors



ICS Group (India) makes a foray in the Indian market with Ayana Hospitality with the flagship property 'Ayana Fort Kochi.' This is pegged as a luxury

boutique hotel in Kochi, the gateway to the state of Kerala. The hotel is a 200-year-old courthouse that has been restored and refurbished with the best of amenities, but keeping the characteristic vibe unimpacted. Akhil Behl, Chief Executive Officer, Ayana Hospitality, said, "It has been designed and renovated in perfect harmony with the legacy of the property, the environs and culture of the region. Our efforts towards guest's experiences are not limited to the hotel premises only, but are far more rounded and encompassing. Going forward we will add more unique properties to our portfolio and will strive to raise the bar in personalized tailored luxury."

Taxation changes for tour operators

According to a ruling from the top courts of India, from January 22 2017, tour operators will have to pay a service



tax on 60 per cent of the amount that they bill the customer. This is likely to impact the cost of the tours by 10-15 per cent upward. Before this, tour

operators had to pay service tax on 25 per cent of the bill amount if they offered a packaged tour. In the case of offering their service for booking a hotel as part of a tour, they paid service tax on only 10 per cent of the bill amount. For any other tour-related service, the service tax was on 40 per cent of the bill amount.

ibis has an address in Ernakulum

Kerala, while gearing up for the end of the year high season, is seeing a surge of new hotels this year. One of the most successful brands in the business travel sector is ibis. Accor Hotels brings its international economy brand, in the capital of Kerala with the opening of ibis Kochi City Centre. Jean-Michel Cassé, Senior Vice President, Operations, AccorHotels India said, "We are pleased to open our first AccorHotels' property, ibis Kochi City



Centre in Kerala. The property features 115 guest rooms furnished with the signature 'Sweet Bed' by ibis, in-room amenities and Wi-Fi access. The hotel has two

meeting rooms with state-of-the-art technology that can accommodate up to 70 guests for meetings and private

events. Fitness enthusiasts can use the hotel's Cardio Centre. Located on Ernakulum's commercial hub – MG Road, the hotel is only minutes from the upcoming Kochi Metro station and a short drive from the Ernakulam Railway Station. The sprawling Lulu Mall also accessible from the hotel.

Andaz in Delhi takes first steps

Hyatt Hotels Corporation has recently announced the opening of Andaz Delhi, marking the brand's first step into a different category of hotels in India and 16th



worldwide. The hotel will be located at Aerocity, close to the airport. Andaz is within easy reach of downtown Delhi with malls and dining options, and the business hub of Gurgaon. Andaz Delhi

opens with a partial inventory of its residential-style 401 guestrooms, including 45 suites. The hotel will also offer 129 serviced apartments, expected to open next year.

Air India's Delhi-Washington flight starts in July



Expanding operations overseas, Air India announces a flight on the Delhi- San Francisco route. Air India is set to start another route to the United States and will start direct flight operations on

Delhi-Washington-Delhi route in July 2017. This flight will be the fifth direct connection with the US and shall be operated by Boeing 777 aircraft. In addition to this, in May 2017, Air India is looking to offer a real treat to Indian travelers by connecting Bangkok, one of the most favored tourist destinations by starting direct flight operations on Chandigarh-Bangkok-Chandigarh and Kolkata

Zoom Air to start operation from Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh



The latest scheduled airline in India — Zoom Air — which received an air operator's permit (AOP) on February 3, might start operations from Pasighat airport in Arunachal Pradesh. The

airline will launch its scheduled commercial operation on Delhi-Kolkata-Durgapur-Delhi route on February 12. The airline is in talks with the Arunachal Pradesh government to connect the newly built airport. Koustav Mohan Dhar, Executive Director and CEO, Zoom Air has reportedly revealed that they are awaiting clearances from the state government as well as the DGCA.

NEWS & VIEWS





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Indo Asia Tours is participating in the below mentioned upcoming roadshows in 2017. You can schedule an appointment at marketing@indoasiatours.com to meet us in person at these shows :

- **Utter Pradesh Travel Mart, 2017 Lucknow, Utter Pradesh (25th – 27th Feb, 2017)**
- **ITB Berlin, 2017, Germany (08th – 12th Mar, 2017)**
- **GITB, 2017 Jaipur, Rajasthan (23rd – 25th Apr, 2017)**

IA SAYS



It is my vision that Indo Asia suggests transformative trips and add to your travel plans, such that the subcontinent becomes the region that you associate with life-changing journeys. On that note, I'd like to talk to about a place that is close to my heart. It is a photograph taken on the highest motorable pass in the world, Khardung La, shot in 1985, that takes me back to Ladakh, a forgotten region in the northern most state of Jammu & Kashmir.

Travellers have always associated the still water of the Dal Lake, rich culinary heritage and unique faces of the Srinagar region with J&K, but actually the state holds unparalleled beauty in other parts as well. For long, only one aspect of the state was celebrated. Immortalized by movies, Srinagar became the unsaid beacon to travellers, for this region. It was only in the 1970's that Ladakh started featuring in the minds of offbeat travellers.

It was a name that appeared on the ancient Silk Route, but was inaccessible and intriguing to the minds of travellers.

Ladakh's high passes, almost unmotorable roads, inaccessibility by flights and hardly any enroute-infrastructure made this a last frontier that only intrepid travellers longed to tread on. In the next decade, army presence made the region slightly more accessible, and small footsteps were made in the areas of travel and hospitality. It was only in the 90's when tourism picked up pace here. The route from Rohtang pass, via Keylong, Sarchu and Jispa made road travel possible. This was different from the long winding journey through the Drass region. Once the infrastructure improved, so did the footfall of tourists to this magical world.

Suddenly the ancient Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, local festivals, unique food and a heartwarming local culture, nothing like mainland India, became an option to explore.

For many, this is still the holy land where Guru Padmasambhava walked on. In fact, till date his imprints lie in the Thikse Monastery off Leh, the tourist centre of the region. In the same way, modern day Guru, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has made his presence felt in the region. The lure of this spiritual land is inimitable.

Apart from this, the stunning mineral rich mountains in shades of brown, blue, green and purple, add a unique touch to the barren desert mountain topography. The thundering Zaskar River is one of the best places for rafting adventures and the Indus meanders gently through the region. The elusive snow leopards guard their mountainous homes and reveal themselves to very few. The high altitude intensely lakes like Pangong Tso and Tso Moriri make veritable getaways. Topographical wonders apart, there is rich Buddhist heritage to discover.

With direct flights, smooth tarmac and enroute infrastructure becoming robust, Leh and the region around have become a hallmark of mountain journeys in India. Something that is sure to change you in ways that you would have not imagined.

Gajendra Singh Panwar

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!



Mr. Bhaskar Chakraborty | DGM

Bhaskar has spent close to a decade at Indo Asia, and has made us richer with his love for travel and reading. He is the one person you can rely on to give sharp and constructive insights into a plan. We hope he keeps travelling and keeps reading more.