

SPIITI LEFT BANK TREK

INTERESTING FACTS/INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE

Spiti Valley

The name Spiti can be translated as “The Middle Land” for it is the region that lies in between India and Tibet. Its ancient monasteries are a treasure trove of old Buddhist research and culture and has millennia old books that have been very well preserved, thanks to its extremely dry and cold climate. Among the many monasteries, the most famed are the Kyi (or Kii) monastery, which with its amazing cliff hugging design, is one of the most photographed; and the Tabo monastery, that is regarded as the Dalai Lama’s favourite. Among its sub-divisions, is the Pin Valley that due to its remoteness is the last sanctuary of the Buchen lamas of the Nyingmapa sect. The highest motorable pass is the Kunzum-La which, at 14,931 feet is the only access to the valley in winter, but can also get closed down for short periods of time due to snowfall. The valley is quite barren and tough to negotiate with an average height of 12,000 – 14,000 feet for most of its settlements.

Culture and Lifestyle – The people of Spiti are Buddhist and their language belongs to the Tibetan language family. They used to practice polyandry but of late this is becoming rare with the advent of tourism and outside influences. The biggest festival is Losar (Tibetan new Year) and is celebrated with great joy during the months of either January or February, based on the “kaalachakra”, the Tibetan calendar.

The villages are sparsely populated and the people here are hard working and practice potato farming or weaving. Owing to the harsh winters, the people still favour the nutritious salty butter tea and store dried meat for the long months with little or no access to greens. The houses are flat topped and built with a short squat profile, well spread out, since the region is prone to earthquakes. The design style is reminiscent of the Tibetan style and in places, you would be forgiven for thinking that post the Chinese invasion of Tibet, the true culture and Architecture of Tibet probably thrives here more as compared to Lhasa.

Geography – There is some amazing natural topography in this seemingly barren land. While going further north of Kaza (the district headquarters) you will see fantastic mesas and fluted rock canyons that are an adventurer’s delight. If you take the trouble to go on down to the Spiti river bank, you will see some fantastic multi-coloured, perfectly round shaped pebbles on the river bed and by its sides. They are green, blue, pink, maroon, purple... all kinds of fantastic hues, indicating the rich mineral wealth of the region.

There are also a couple of truly breath-taking lakes in the region – the Chandra-Tal (moon lake) that actually falls in Lahaul district but is approachable from Kunzum Pass. It is a divine looking crescent shaped lake with emerald blue waters that change colour throughout the day. The other less-visited lake nestled away in the mountains, is the Dhankar lake. This is approached via a day trek from the town of Dhankar, home to the famous Dhankar monastery.

Adding adventure are the stark peaks that surround the valley, some of which are also trekking peaks and are a rewarding excursion on their own. The best example is Mt. Kanamo (19,500 feet) which is accessible from Kibber where you can do a multi-stage trek upwards to the summit. Another exciting expedition is the Bara Shigri glacier that is the largest glacier in Himachal Pradesh, and also the second longest in India (after Gangotri)

The Pin valley National Park that lies within Spiti is also the home of the elusive Snow leopard and the ibex and you can undertake expeditions set out to try and get a glimpse of the majestic creature.

Mythology – While there are many fantastic myths in the region, there is none more alluring than the story of the 600 year old mummified monk, Sangha Tenzin. About 80 kms east of Kaza, lies the village of Gue, where this naturally preserved mummified body of the monk can be seen, seated in deep meditation. The story goes that when his village was plagued by an infestation of scorpions, he decided to cease eating and slowly starve himself to self-mummification (a practice still followed by a sect in Japan) After he had been mummified naturally and his spirit left his body, it is said that a rainbow appeared in the sky and a kaleidoscope of butterflies appeared in place of the scorpions, who forever disappeared.