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Manali - Leh travel guide

Route: Manali - Rohtang Jot - Kokhsar - Tandi - Keylong - Jispa - Darcha - Baralacha La - Bharatpur - Sarchu - Gata Loops - Nakee La - Lachulung La - Pang - More Plains - Tanglang La - Upshi - Karu - Leh

Distance: 490 kms

Route opens: Mid May to Mid October (depending on the amount of snow and weather)

Getting there

Apart from taking your own car ([Howto prepare your car for ladakh](#)), bike or a motorcycle ([Howto prepare your motorcycle for Ladakh](#)) to Leh, you can also hire motorcycle, taxi or take a bus to reach Leh; the details of these are given below:

Bus: Himachal Tourism and State Transport Corporation along with J&K SRTC and several other travel companies run regular bus service to Leh. These buses normally take 2 days to reach Leh with stopovers at Keylong or Sarchu. This is one of the most economical ways to travel to Leh.

Taxis: There are several options available while hiring a taxi for Leh, from booking a single seat in a shared taxi, to booking the whole taxi for yourself or sharing it with another couple. While hiring a taxi do remember that quite a few taxis these days indulge in the canon ball run (19-20 hour journey to Leh), which would leave you gasping for breath and with little time to enjoy the Manali Leh highway. Unless you are really short on time, take a taxi with one or two night stopovers.

Hired Motorcycles: There are quite a few rental shops in Manali which rent out motorcycles for Ladakh trip. You can even get motorcycles for one way i.e. you can leave them in Leh instead of bringing them back to Manali. Many people like to rent motorcycles from Delhi, since it has a more options to choose from. For reference, please read "[Renting Motorcycles in India](#)".

The Journey

Out of the two routes to reach Leh, Manali - Leh is the preferred choice of adventure travelers and photography enthusiasts. This is not only due to the fact that it is more scenic of the two, it is also longer and more rugged. And this very fact entices people to undertake this journey, which involves crossing five high altitude passes in the span of 1-3 days.

While many taxis available in Manali do this route in what is called a canon ball run (19-21 hours) it is recommended to take it slow and divide the journey into 2 days or more. This way you will have enough time to marvel at natures splendors and indulge in photography. Remember, the first trip down this road would be forever etched into your memory, so take it easy and enjoy the journey.

Manali - Rohtang La (52kms): Fun starts within an hour of leaving Manali, as you make your way to the first high altitude pass, Rohtang La 13,050ft, a.k.a. heap of dead bodies!

Roads are mostly in good condition and with in an hour of leaving Manali, you should be at Marhi (19kms before Rohtang); you can have your breakfast here or at Rohtang Parking, followed by a quick stop at the Rohtang pass for photos.

Rohtang La - Kokhsar (19kms): Even though road from Rohtang to Kokhsar is downhill all the way, it is mostly in bad condition. Foreign nationals are supposed to get themselves registered at the check post in Kokhsar, apart from that, this small town has little to offer unless you want to have a quick meal or want to spend the night at the only guest house in town.

Kokhsar - Tandi (38kms): Journey from here is also downhill till Tandi and roads are mostly in a state of disarray. Tandi has the last petrol pump before Leh, roughly 380kms from here. So dont forget to tank up before moving on to Keylong.

Petrol pump at Tandi

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Tandi - Keylong (9kms): Keylong is the last place where your mobile phone will work before you reach Leh and also the last place where you can hope to find a mechanic, in case you are having some problems with your vehicle get it checked ASAP! Also this is a preferred stop over for many who decide to split their journey in to three days or more.

Keylong - Darcha (28kms): From Keylong roads are in some what better condition and only get smoother as you approach Jispa and eventually Darcha. Once at Darcha, take a break and tank up on supplies and get your self registered at the check post here.

Darcha - Sarchu (84kms): Roads are mostly in bad shape and as the altitude increases, you might start noticing the first effects of [Acute Mountain Sickness](#). It is advisable to take it easy and dont over stress your self, especially at the summit of Baralacha La, 16,500ft. From Baralacha La it is again a downhill but a rough ride till Bharatpur, after which the road condition starts improving gradually as you approach Sarchu.

Sarchu, at an altitude of 14,000ft, is a collection of tents and a militarily base. Even though it is quite a windy place and high in altitude, it is the prefer night stop for most travelers. You will need to register at the check post in Sarchu before proceeding further.

Sarchu - Pang (80kms): Roads from Sarchu till the start of Gata Loops are in good condition and the progress is fast.

Gata Loops are a collection of 21 loops that take you to an altitude of 15,302 ft, roads in the loops are in not so good condition and the slow moving trucks leaving cloud of thick smoke make the ascent feel tougher than it actually is.

Next up is the third pass on the Manali Leh route, Nakee La, 15,547ft. While few km down the road is Lachulung La pass situated at an altitude of 16,616 ft.

The descent from Lachulung La will take you to Pang, which is a temporary tent settlement and has a check post where travelers need to register themselves. Take a breather here and eat some thing for the final push to Leh.

Pang - Upshi (125kms): The road from Pang will take you to the famous Moore Plains; situated in a plateau, you will be hard-pressed to believe this relatively flat piece of land is located at an altitude of 15,400ft. Road here are relatively straight and in good condition, inviting you to indulge in speeding. But dont! Road is quite bumpy and it will be a good workout for your vehicles suspension and your stomach.

More Plains



After the fast paced journey on the Moore plains, you will find your self on the ascent to the third highest pass you will encounter in Ladakh, Tanglang La (17,582ft). Final few kms to the summit of the pass are in bad condition and the steepness coupled with lack of air takes a toll on vehicles performance. But once you reach the top you will be greeted with spectacular views, in fact from Tanglang La you can clearly spot the road to the pass for miles on both directions.

Descent from Tanglang La for first few kms is in bad condition, however after that you will be greeted with spectacular roads and with the altitude decreasing gradually, your spirits will start picking up and you will feel rejuvenated by the time you reach Upshi.

Upshi - Leh (55kms): A small break for a cup of tea/coffee at Upshi to unwind is recommended before you continue your journey on the Manali Leh highway to reach Leh, less than an hours drive from Upshi. You can also spend the night in Upshi in case you are too tired to continue with the journey.

Accommodations

There are several accommodation options available at various places in Manali Leh route; here are few places along the way, where you can spend the night.

Kokhsar: There is only one guesthouse in Kokhsar.

Keylong: Apart from the majestic HPTDC hotel Chandrabhaga which offers rooms, luxury tents and dorms, there are several small guest houses as well where you can spend the night.

Jispa: Jispa has quite a few tent settlements along and a guesthouse.

Darcha: There is tented accommodation available at Darcha where one can spend the night.

Zingzing Bar: In case the weather turns ugly en route to Baralacha La, you can find accommodation at Zingzing Bar dhaba tent.

Bharatpur: There are few tents at Bharatpur which offer basic accommodation.

Sarchu: Sarchu only has tents to offer to an exhausted traveler; however there are quite a few choices here, from cheap accommodation in Dhaba tents which costs Rs. 30 per person to luxury tents costing thousands of rupees a night.

Pang: Pang also has tented accommodation available, although choices are less than one gets in Sarchu.

Upshi: There are few guest houses in Upshi along side the Leh Manali highway.

Leh: Leh being the capital and tourist hub of Ladakh has tons of accommodation options to suit budget of every type, from dorms costing as little as Rs. 75/per person a night to luxurious hotels and resorts costing a thousands of rupees a night. For a list of accommodation options available in Leh, [please click here](http://www.bcmtouring.com/travel-guides/ladakh-travel-guide/manali-leh-travel-guide.html)

Amenities

Phone services: Mobile phone networks only work in Manali, Marhi and in some parts of Rohtang, Tandi and Keylong. One can also find paid phones in Manali, Keylong and Jispa. Only after reaching

the outskirts of Leh, mobile phones from select operators start working and one can hope to find a pay phone. For more please read [Phone Services in Ladakh](#).

Petrol Pumps: The only petrol pumps before Leh are in Tandi and Manali, so be sure to fill up your tank here and carry enough petrol for rest of the journey.

Mechanics: The last place on Manali Leh highway for finding a mechanic is at Keylong, so in case you're having problem with your vehicle, please get it checked there.

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