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Leh – Pangong Tso Travel Guide

Route: Leh – Shey – Karu – Shakti – Chang La – Durbuk – Tanksey – Lukung – Spangmik (Pangong Tso)

Distance: 170kms

Route Opens: Mid May to late October (depends on the 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 the largest salt water lake in Asia, you can also hire a motorcycle or a taxi from Leh or take a bus run by J&K SRTC; the details of these are given below:

Bus: There is a regular bus service run by J&K SRTC and occasionally there are buses operated by travel agents as well for groups.

Taxis: You can get a seat in local taxis, which are normally run in the same manner as a local bus or you can hire one yourself. For more details please contact the Leh Taxi Union at 01982 - 252723/253039

Hiring Motorcycles: Motorcycle enthusiasts who are unable to take their motorcycles to Leh can get one for rent for local sight seeing and to go to places such as Pangong Tso. One can find numerous bike rental shops at the old post office road or you can ask your hotel to arrange one for you. For reference, please read "[Renting Motorcycles in India](#)".



The Journey

Many travelers do the Leh – Pangong Tso excursion as a day trip and come back to Leh by night fall. However this is not at all recommended, since the 340 km long round trip leaves little time for Pangong Tso, which is a magnificent lake and doing this excursion in the span of 2 - 3 days is highly recommended.

Leh – Karu (45 kms): Start off from Leh early in the morning after breakfast and start driving/riding on the Leh – Manali highway till you reach the town of Karu. Road is in good condition and journey is fast paced, due to this you will be in Karu in less than an hour.

Karu – Chang La (35 kms): From Karu you need to take the left turn that would take you to the village Shakti, roads are mostly straight till you cross Shakti and a few kilometer thereafter the real ascent for Chang La starts. For most part ascent is steep and initially roads are in good condition. As you approach the final few kms of the ascent to Chang La, road conditions start to deteriorate and steepness increase, making the affair of reaching the summit of Chang La more challenging and memorable.

Of all the passes one encounters in Ladakh (barring Marsimik La), Chang La is the steepest and due to bad roads at the final ascent it is also the toughest, no wonder it is called "The Mighty Chang La".





At 17,800ft it is also the second highest pass in Ladakh that you will come across. Once you reach the summit, you will be greeted by the Indian Army troops who are stationed here to acclimatize to high altitude, before they are posted in world's highest battlefield, Siachen. There is a temple on top of Chang La pass, called Chang La Baba ka Mandir, as well as a cabin built by the army where you can warm up yourself while chatting with the soldiers.

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Chang La – Tanksey (58 kms): After a few minutes rest, it's time to begin the descent from Chang La, road is in bad condition for few kilometers, beyond which superbly laid tarmac coupled with beautiful scenery awaits you.

Your next big break will be at Tanksey a.k.a. Tangste; Tanksey is a big town with few shops, hotels and an internet café. It is a good idea to have your lunch here or in case you have arrived late in the evening, then spend the night here instead of continuing to Lukung or Spangmik where finding accommodation in peak season can be an issue.

Tanksey – Spangmik (Pangong Tso) (32 kms): Journey beyond Tanksey for most part is through fantastically laid tarmac and views, however don't indulge in over speeding, since there are quite a few water passages built in the middle of the road, which essentially mean 8-10 feet long depression in the middle of the road without any warnings!

As you approach the lake, the sheer size of it starts becoming more apparent as you finally reach its shores. On the banks of the lake is a military camp and also Lukung which is a collection of tents and newly built Eco Huts.



From here you can carry on, on the road that turns in to sand and rock filled dirt track. The small settlement visible from here is the village of Spangmik, the last village up to which you are allowed to go on normal inner line permits.

Spangmik – Marsimek La (42 kms): 10 kms before Spangmik on the Spangmik – Tanksey road is a diversion that goes towards the village of Phobrang and finally to the highest Motorable pass in the world, Marsimek La a.k.a. Marsimik-La a.k.a. Marsmik-La. For more information on this route, please read [60kph's Marsimek-La route guide](#).

Restricted Area: Pangong Tso, Marsimek La and Chang La are restricted areas and to visit them, you need permits which are easily obtainable from the DC's office in Leh and can be procured by either submitting the application yourself or through a travel agent. The permits are issued for a maximum period of three weeks, in case you are visiting other restricted areas like Tso Moriri and Nubra Valley you need to mention them in the permit as well.

If you want to attempt Marsimek La then you need to specifically mention that while applying for permits. Make at least 4 photocopies of the permit per region, since you would need to submit them at various check posts.

Accommodations

Tanksey: Even though Tanksey is 32 kms before Pangong Tso, it is a good place to spend the night, due to sheer number of accommodation options and their quality which is better than both Lukung and Spangmik.

Lukung: Eco Huts at Lukung are just right of the shore of Pangong Tso. Be warned there is no electricity or proper toilet, just camping grade toilet and warm water courtesy solar water heater. Beside this one can also pitch ones own tents here.

Spangmik: Spangmik only has one hotel which offers rooms as well as luxury tents; however get ready to shell out any where between Rs.700 - 1200 for these. One can also find accommodation in guest houses that some inhabitants of Spangmik run from their home.

Amenities

Petrol pumps: It is essential to fill up your vehicles petrol tank at Leh and carry enough petrol for the return journey, since there are no petrol pumps beyond the outskirts of Leh.

Phone services: Beyond Thiksey there are no phone booths and mobile phone coverage, however there is an internet café at Tanksey.

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