



Jamyang Foundation



Zangskar

Safety

The road to Zangskar starts in Kargil, a small town about 6 km. from the Pakistani border. The road was blocked in 1999 due to fighting and volunteers could not get in. The best thing to do would be to check the current situation closer to the time. People in Leh would be able to advise you. If the road is closed, you could sight-see around Leh and then go to teach in Spiti instead. It takes two days by bus or jeep: Leh (Ladakh) to Keylong (Lahaul) to Hansa (Spiti) and on to our monasteries on Pangmo and Morang.

Language

The local language is Zangskari, which is similar to Tibetan. Urdu is taught in the schools. If you are learning Hindi-Urdu, you might try to emphasize the Urdu vocabulary.

Post

There is a post office in Padum, Zangskar's district capital. The projects' mailing addresses are as follows:

Changchub Choling Monastery
Village Zangla, P.O. Padum
Zangskar, Dist. Kargil, J&K State
India

Khachoe Drubling Monastery
Village Karsham, P.O. Padum
Zangskar, Dist. Kargil, J&K State
India

Pishu Monastery
Village Pishu, P.O. Padum
Zangskar, Dist. Kargil, J&K State
India

Weather

What is life like in the winter at these monasteries? The weather is very cold. The snow gets several meters high. Food is simple, fuel is scarce, but volunteers have stayed through the winter in Zangskar, and say it is a wonderful experience. I think only the very hardy should consider it. The nuns would be delighted to have a teacher anytime, and especially during the winter months when they have plenty of time to study. The best plan would be to go in during the summer and stay on if you like it. Weather in summer is lovely.

Miscellaneous

In Zangskar at the moment, we would recommend Changchub Choling, because the nuns have a little English experience (very little), have a nice guest room, and have no other teacher at present. The old lama is too sick to hold classes and they are really sad not to be able to continue their studies.

If you stay in private homes along the way, it is courteous to offer Rs. 50 per day as a donation. Give this discreetly to the hostess upon departure and say it is for the kids (bache—the “a” sounds like the “u” in “under”).

Travel

To get to Zangskar is quite a complicated matter. First, you need to get to Leh. From Leh, you go to Kargil, where Zangskar’s one road begins. From Kargil, you travel this road to Padum, the district capital of Zangskar. All three Jamyang Choling projects are accessible from Padum.

The easiest way into Leh is by air. You can fly into Leh year-round from Delhi or Chandigarh or Jammu. It is easy to fly from Delhi to Leh in June. Early June, before the monsoon begins, is best. Sometimes the road into Zangskar doesn’t open until July or early August, however. The flight from Delhi is one hour each way, and about \$120 round-trip. Tickets need to be booked well in advance. For tickets, you might try Renu at Rventure Travel: rventure@giasd101.vsnl.net.in. In Leh, you will find comfortable accommodations and restaurants. The one concern with flying into Leh is the altitude. If you have had any troubles with altitude sickness (or think you might!), we suggest that you travel to Leh by road, in order to give your body time to adjust.

The only road option in winter and spring is the one through Srinagar in Kashmir, which is not recommended for tourists. From late June or July the road from Leh to Manali is generally open. If the Rothang pass is open you can go by deluxe bus from Manali to Leh. It takes a couple of days with a stop at a tent camp at night. The Lonely Planet Himalaya guide book has sections on this road and Zangskar.

From Leh to Kargil there are a number of buses that span the stretch of road daily. They are 12 hours and 130 Rs. There are many stops along the way if you want to break up your journey. Taxi is also an option, about 3000 Rs. In Kargil, the Sechen Hotel is clean, with hot showers (about Rs. 400).

From Kargil to Padum the bus leaves every other morning at 3 or 4 AM. It takes 14 hours and costs about 200 Rs. The buses start running some time after the road opens. A travel agent (such as Potala in McLeod Ganj) should be able to help you find out when this will be. Book a seat on the bus to Padum as soon as you arrive. With luck, you can leave the next morning. There are also jeeps—more comfortable, but expensive (US \$100-150).

Rest up at a hotel in Padum and then set off for Karsha, Pishu or Zangla. The road turns north again after Padum. It may be possible to get a ride somehow, but we aren't aware of any busses at this time. It is only (only!) a three-hour walk to Khachoe Drubling Monastery in Karsha across the river from Padum, and the other schools are all within 7 km of Padum. Changchub Choling Monastery is in Zangla, a 6 or 8-hour walk up the valley. Sometimes jeeps or buses are available. Pishu Monastery is a two-hour walk across the river from Zangla. When asking for directions as you go, remember that "Jomo Gonpa" means "nunnery."

Have a safe trip!