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Ladakh has many historic monasteries called Gompas, some of them are 4/5 hundreds years old are places for Buddhist monks and nuns to live, to study and to practice their religion. The monasteries of Ladakh are situated in scenic locations, and on hill-tops and mountains. Some monasteries have rich collections of Buddhist Thangka paintings, art and architecture. Most of the monasteries are open to tourists who can admire the architecture and art collections of these Gompas. Monasteries in Ladakh may be either of the Mahayana or the Hinayana sect of Buddhism. The monasteries of Ladakh are unique flavor and beauty of this cold desert region.

Hemis Gompa: The biggest monastery in Ladakh located 45 Km to the south of Leh. It was built in 1630 and houses monks of the Red Hat sect (Mahayana Buddhism). Tourists can see beautiful paintings on the walls and the largest Thangka painting in Ladakh, which is over 12 m in length. The Hemis Gompa is famous for its annual Hemis festival held in June or July, which is commemorating the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism by the colorful mask dances. Dancers wearing brightly colored masks that represent good and evil characters, perform an ancient tale of the victory of good over evil. The Festival also includes a exciting market where craftsmen sell handcrafted items.

Shankar Gompa: It is located 2 km north of the town center of Leh. The Gompa belongs to the Gelukpa order and has an impressive impression of the Buddhist deity Avalokiteshwara Padmahari with 1,000 arms and heads.

Shanti Stupa: It was built by a Japanese Buddhist organization to commemorate 2500 years of Buddhism and to promote World Peace. The Shanti Stupa was inaugurated by H.H. Dalai Lama in 1985. You can approach the monastery by a steep flight of steps or by a 3 Km route from the Fort Road. The views of the sunset and sunrise from the Shanti Stupa are spectacular.

Namgyal Tsemo Gompa: It was constructed in 1430. This historic gompa has a rich collection of Buddhist art and manuscripts and an image of Buddha. It is 3 stories high. There is a ruined fort a.k.a. Leh Palace ahead of the monastery, from where you can see panoramic views of Leh Town.

Lamayuru Gompa: It is located on a high rocky projection and founded in the 10th century, which overlooks a valley and the village of Lamayuru, 125 Km west of Leh. It is also called the Yung Drung or Swastika monastery. It has a many Thangka paintings in its main hall. The annual festival of Lamayuru Monastery is held every summer on the 28th and 29th days, of the 2nd month of the Tibetan calendar. As the legend goes; Lamayuru was a lake. It was blessed by a Lama after which the water of the lake receded up to the mountains leaving place for the monastery to be built. Lamayuru has charming caves carved out of the mountainside. For sheer spectacle value no other gompa can match Lamayuru

Shey Monastery: It is situated on a hillock 15 km south of Leh. Shey Gompa was previously the summer palace of the Ladakhi kings. A prince of Ladakh Deldan Namgyal installed the 12 m tall gold-plated copper statue of Sakyamuni Buddha in 1633 as a funerary memorial to his father, king Singee Namgyal, which can be seen here. The Shey Gompa celebrates its annual festival on the 30th day of the 1st month of the Tibetan calendar.

Likir Monastery: The Likir Monastery a.k.a. the Klu-Kkhjil or "water spirits" Gompa is situated 52 Km from Leh. It was founded in 11th century. The Gompa was burnt down in the 15th century, the present Gompa is an 18th century construction and houses monks of the Gyalukpa sect. The Likir

monastery has a rich collection of paintings, ceremonial dress and artifacts. The Likir Festival is held from the 17th to 19th of the 12th month of the Tibetan Buddhist calendar (Lunar calendar).

Spituk Monastery: It is perched on a high hill overlooking the Indus river about 18 Km from Leh. Rinchen Zangpo the Great Translator who helped in spreading Buddhism in Ladakh named the monastery. (Spituk means exemplary). The Spituk monastery is known for its collection of Buddhist artifacts and for the Spituk festival held from the 17th to 19th days of the 11th month of the Buddhist calendar. On the top of the hill is a Mahakal Temple, where a fearsome huge image of Vajrabhairava is unveiled once a year at its annual festival.

Thiksey monastery: It is one of the finest examples of Ladakhâ€™s architecture. It is located 20km from Leh. It is 12 storey high and has many statues of Buddha, a pillar inscribed with Buddhist teachings. Maitreya Buddha of 15 m high seated in the main prayer hall. It has a vast collection of Buddhist art. Home to monks of the Gelukpa order the Thiksey monastery is known for its annual festival held from the 17th to 19th day of the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar.

Alchi Gompa: It is situated on the right bank of the River Indus and is easily accessible since it is the only Gompa in Ladakh, which is located on flat ground. It was founded by Ringchen Zangpo, the great translator. Alchi Gompa has a Kashmiri influence in its art and architecture. Within the monastery you can see many beautiful images of Buddha.

Gurphuk Gompa: A branch of Spituk Monastery is a little away from the Stok palace, and only 14 km southeast of Leh. It is famous for its festival "Guru Tsechu" held on the 9th and 10th of the 1st month of Tibetan Calendar.

Three days trek from Stok to Spituk and the 8 days trek of Stok to Markha Valley starts from here. Enjoy trekking in Ladakh or Jeep Safari while moving from monastery to monastery.

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