



FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Every year, hundreds of monks and explorers make their way to the Himalayan sanctuary of Ladakh, for the region's most revered celebration. With a party of clients preparing to climb the steep steps to enlightenment, we sent our research team deep into this remote region to uncover some of its secrets. Our quest was not only richly rewarded with insight and learning, but also with delicately flavoured tea and biscuits with the King.

Ladakh; stunningly stark and overwhelmingly beautiful, this corner of India was completely isolated from the rest of the world until the 1970s. Cut off by the towering Himalayas, its winding roads and mountain passes are only accessible for a few idyllic summer months. It's this remoteness, combined with the unforgettable landscape and cooler temperatures that makes it a perfect sanctuary from Delhi's colorful and perfect madness.

For those interested in folklore, the best time to visit is June when hundreds of monks gather in the Hemis monastery

courtyard, taking part in Ladakh's best loved celebration, the Hemis Festival. Overlooking the Indus River, flanked by fluttering prayer flags and perched against a jagged Himalayan peak, this impressive monastery hosts two days of performances, including colorful mask dances and sacred plays to the sounds of drums, cymbals and long horns. Anyone eager to make the journey can join these fascinating rituals, believed to bestow spiritual strength and good health on observers.

With only 2 days of celebration to play with, we dug deep to ensure our clients would learn and see as much as possible in a short time frame. We called on our friends in the region who opened heavy, ornate and often gilded doors for us, giving us access to some inspiring individuals at the heart of Hemis' magnificent cultural extravaganza.

A long-standing member of the monastic community explained the fundamentals of the monastery's ancient rituals, and enlightened us about the significance of the big event. As eager

scholars we were then invited to a private audience with the Royal Lama, who added gravitas and insight, giving us an authoritative historical perspective on Buddhism and insights into its relevance in modern Indian society. Our conversations allowed us to explore other aspects of this Himalayan Kingdom's culture, tracking down local art and architectural historians, as well as archaeologists engaged in conserving the ancient monuments. In typical Brown + Hudson style, we were getting deep inside the subject matter, leaving no stone unturned.

Word of our thirst for knowledge reached the highest echelons of Ladakh society and one afternoon we found ourselves in the company of His Royal Excellency Raja Jigmed Wangchuk Namgyal, The King of Ladakh. Over tea and biscuits we discussed our common vision: to create opportunities for select visitors to understand and appreciate the region's complex history and culture from the inside. Later in the afternoon, he extended the most generous of Royal invitations by allowing select clients of Brown + Hudson the privilege of staying in the palace as his guests.

To dig deep into the cultural fabric of a region, give our Trip Planning Team a call on +44 203 358 0110.

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