Zanskar

Overview

Zanskar is a district in Ladakh region of Jammu & Kashmir. It is famous for its stunning scenery and Tibetan-style Buddhist monasteries. Zanskar is similar to Ladakh in many respects only being more remote and less densely populated, and with less infrastructure. Zanskar is spread over 7,000 sq km and ranges in altitude between 11,500 – 23,000 feet. It's remoteness, friendly people, deep rooted Buddhist roots, and Tibetian influence make it a dream travel destination within India.

Zanskar is a high-altitude mountainous area, filled with glaciers and mountain passes with stunning vistas. It is an unspoilt trekker and hard core traveller's paradise.

Zanskar is only accessible for about 4 months each year (from June / July to September / October). Due to heavy winter snowfall at the important Pensi La (or Penze-La) mountain pass, all access passes remain closed during the remainder of the year.

Padum is the largest town, albeit it more like a village, in the Zanskar region. Roads connect Padum with Kargil, Srinagar, Leh, and Jammu. The roads in the region are demanding. Speeds of 20 / kms per hour are the norm and add significantly to travel time. For example, it takes 2 days to cover the distance between Srinagar and Leh (437 kms).

History

Zanskar has traces of human activity dating back to the Bronze Age with numerous instances of petroglyphs attributed to hunters that lived on the steppes of central Asia ranging between Kazakhstan and China. Buddhism spread its influence in Zanskar, coming in from Kashmir, possibly around 200 BC. In the 7th century, Zanskar and a large part of the Western Himalaya were overrun by Tibetans, who imposed their then animistic Bön religion - thus reducing the influence of Buddhism. However, Buddhism regained its influence over Zanskar in the 8th century when the religion was adopted by Tibet itself.

Till the 15th century Zanskar existed essentially as an independent Buddhist Kingdom ruled by between related royal families. At this point, Zanskar became subordinate to Ladakh. In 1822 a coalition of Kulu, Lahoul, and Kinnaur invadors, plundering Zanskar and destroyed the Royal Palace in the town of Padum. When Jammu & Kashmir became part of India in 1947, Zanskar / Ladakh became part of India.

Due to the border conflicts in the mid-20th century (and post Indian independence) between India, China, and Pakistan, Ladakh and Zanskar lost two thirds of thier original territory. However, despite Zanksar's tumultuous history, it hasn't lost its unique cultural and religious heritage / identity that has existed since the 8th century.

Quick Facts

State

Jammu and Kashmir, India

Location

Zanskar is in Kargil district, which lies in the eastern half of Jammu & Kashmir.

Best Time To Visit

June to late October are the only viable times to vist, unless one is an extreme and ruggard trekker and can handle the harsh cold, wind, snow/ice of the winter in the Zanskar region.

Tourist Offices

STD Code

Sightseeing

Zanksar's stark mountain landscape, stunning situated monasteries, towering snow peaks, and tiny villages make an incredible tourism destination.

Zanskar Valley is cradeled by two branches and tributaries of the Zansker River with water sources ranging from as high as 16,700 ft. Lungnak Valley is hostile and rugged with little habitation and stunning in its sparseness. The Stod Valley is the greener with vast panoramas and picturesquely set farms.

Tourism in Zanskar has however been disrupted significantly in recent times due to the border conflicts between India and Pakistan.

Planning a Trip

Getting There

Air

Leh and Srinagar have airports that provide access to Zanskar.

Rail

Jammu has the closest railway station to Zanskar.

Road

Zanskar is inaccessible for almost 8 months each year (from September to June). Due to heavy winter snowfall at the Pensi La (or Penze-La) mountain pass, all access passes remain closed.

The easiest approach to the Zanskar region leads from Kargil through the Suru Valley and over the Pensi La mountain pass (4,406 meters). This road connecting Srinagar, Kargil and Leh (Ladakh) is the first road in Zanksar and passes through Padum the largest town in the Zanskar region.

- The distance from Jammu to Leh, on the road that passes through Padum and the Zanskar region, is 230 kms.
- The distance from Srinagar to Leh, on the road passing through Padum and Zanskar is 437 kms.

The roads in the region are demanding. Average speed of 20/ kms per hour is the norm and add significantly to travel time. For example, it takes 2 days to cover the distance between Srinagar and Leh (437 kms).

Getting Around

Other Information

Shopping

Food

Directions

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