

Hiking the Indian Himalayas - Alumni

Ladakh, India

June 15-25, 2026



Features

- 50 miles of trekking through the Ladakh region
- Visiting Buddhist temples and monasteries
- Interacting with subsistence shepherds and farmers
- Two days exploring the Indian city of Leh and the area around it
- Historical and cultural education of the region
- Mule support means light daypacks and great food
- Four nights of hotel accommodation and seven nights camping

Cost: \$2,995

Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 15 Participants

2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

This alumni trip explores northern India's high mountain Himalayan region of Ladakh. Traveling with mules, you will hike through valleys, up mountains, and over passes immersing yourself deep into the culture of this Buddhist region. Along the way, you will visit temples and monasteries with roots reaching to second century Tibetan Buddhism and with people whose ancestry traces even further.

You will start in Leh, the former capital of the Himalayan Kingdom of Ladakh. Leh is situated at 11,500 feet, so the group will spend two days acclimatizing and exploring local sites, monasteries and pagodas before taking to the trail for the next eight days.

After leaving Leh, the group drives to the trailhead to meet the rest of the team for the next eight days of expeditioning. NOLS instructors team with local Indian support staff to transport most of your gear by mule and have meals prepared in traditional fashion. While you will carry daypacks and help with meals, the bulk of the work will be handled by our support team.

Throughout the next eight days you will hike 4-6 hours daily through the villages, farms, and pastures that sprawl across this incredible landscape. You will spend time visiting with locals about their lives and the culture of the region. While you will be at high elevation (11-15,000 ft), you will only be carrying daypacks with extra clothes and lunch while you hike. During the trip, you will be hiking over four significant passes with elevations between 13,000 and 15,000 feet. Most days will gain and lose elevation around 3,000 ft. After a good day on the trail we will eat a hearty dinner and set up camp for the night.

Alumni trips are more relaxed than a typical course; however, it is not a vacation or a guided trip. Trips are self-reliant in remote areas where evacuation to medical facilities can take several days. During the trip, you will be camping, hiking, occasionally helping prepare group meals, and caring for yourself and others.

Trip Environment

You can expect hot days and cool evenings on this trip. June brings highs in the upper 60s(F) and overnight lows in the 40s(F).

Ladakh is a high altitude desert created in the rain shadow of the Himalayas. Rain is not frequent here and most of the water comes from snow melting off the peaks around us. This means that we do not expect large amounts of rain for the trip, but we will be prepared for occasional showers.

Elevation is our primary environmental challenge as the team spends each day between 10,000 and 15,000 ft. Taking advantage of the acclimatization days at the beginning of the trip will be crucial to comfort and enjoyment during the ongoing trek.

Elevation, short summers, and sparse water mean that vegetation in Ladakh is sparse in most areas. You will encounter many grasses and smaller plants and shrubs, but larger trees and lush vegetation are not characteristic of the area.

With some luck, you may see some of the famous wildlife of the region, but they are known to be shy around humans. The bharal (mountain sheep), ibex, yaks, red fox, and snow leopard all call this region home and may be seen in the river valleys.

A Day in the Life

Mornings on the trail will start out with a cup of chai or coffee and move into a casual breakfast. You will make lunch for the day, break camp, and pack team gear onto the mules. Hiking starts mid-morning and includes breaks, photo stops, and eating snacks and lunch as desired. Our group will naturally separate into small hiking groups during the day based on individual pace. Once we reach our destination, we will set up camp and explore the area while our team of local staff prepare dinner for the evening. Dinner cleanup, time spent together as a group, and perhaps a class on the area or culture will wrap up the evening before everyone heads to their shared tents..

Food on the trip will be simple American style meals made from typical NOLS rations. This translates to oatmeals, cereal or biscuits for breakfast, snacks for lunch, and dinners of pasta, pizza, rice, etc. We will blend in some local Indian fare.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 5 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS’ high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group’s schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading, and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal “classes” are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion— this is a mountain expedition.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it’s not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You’ll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip’s anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

June 13	You will need to start traveling on this day and possibly overnight in New Delhi on the way.	
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June 15	6 p.m. - orientation at the hotel in Leh.	Dinner and lodging at the Royal Castle Guest House provided by NOLS. We'll pair you in single-gender rooms or as couples/pals.
June 16	Organized Leh walking tour. This is a leisurely day to recover from travel and acclimatize.	All meals and lodging at the Royal Castle Guest House included.
June 17	Visit local monasteries, a museum and the Peace Pagoda.	All meals and lodging at the Royal Castle Guest House included
June 18	Depart for our trailhead. 1.5 hour drive followed by a 3-4 hike to our first camp.	Camping at the N base of Kichan La (~4200 meters)
June 19	4-5 hours of trekking	Camping at the Shang Sumdo (~4000 meters)
June 20	4-5 hours of trekking	Camping near Shang Phu ~4400 meters
June 21	5-6 hours trekking	Camping near Matho Phu ~4400 meters
June 22	4-5 hours of trekking	Camping at Matho Phu~4400 meters
June 23	5-6 hours trekking	Camping at Mankarmo ~4300 meters
June 24	4-5 hours trekking	Camping at Rumbak – 4000 meters
June 25	Hike out and drive 2 hours back to Leh	Lodging at the Royal Castle Guest House
June 26	Depart for home or your next destination	Breakfast included

Trip Logistics

Getting to Leh, India

Flying:

You should plan on flying to Leh (IXL) no later than the first day. Flights into Leh typically come from Delhi (DEL) and there are a few carriers to choose from. The most economical way to book your flight will be to book a flight into Delhi and then a second, separate flight from Delhi to Leh. Booking a contiguous ticket will often double the overall cost of the airfare.

If possible, plan on arriving several days early to Leh, this will help you start to acclimatize to the altitude, ensure bags arrive, and get a bit oriented to very different surroundings.

From the airport you will easily be able to take a taxi to the hotel. The prices of taxis in Leh are fixed and should be posted in the Taxi somewhere. From the airport, expect to pay \$4-10 depending on how large of a vehicle you are hiring.

Lodging

The trip includes pre-and-post lodging at the [Royal Castle Guest House](#) in Leh. Lodging is single gender in double rooms unless we know that you are traveling with a partner, family member, or friend and would like to stay together.

If you arrive early or stay late, we recommend contacting the same hotel directly to book yourself a room there. While the Royal Castle is a bit outside of town, we believe that the accommodations are worth it and the 15-20 minute walk is great acclimatization.

Storage of Personal Belongings

You will be able to store luggage that is not going camping with you at the hotel before we depart for the trip. Storage will be secure and available as soon as the trip returns to Leh. You will not have access to these items during the trip. Storage is reasonably secure, but NOLS assumes no responsibility for the safety of your stored luggage.

Currency

India uses the Rupee as its currency. You might want cash Rupee for miscellaneous purchases and throughout the trip such as snacks or drinks. You'll receive the best exchange by simply taking money out of ATM's, but your bank might charge you additional fees for this.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out [cat70.com](#) for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

Tipping in the service industry in India is mostly common amongst tourists. For good service a 5% tip is common and for exceptional service 10% is a very large tip.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors

if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Electricity stuff

India has 3 different types of plugs that you might see while over there. Having adapter type C, D, and M will have you prepared for whatever you come across. It is also important to know what voltage of your items can handle as India operates at 230V supply which is higher than the US.

Throughout the trip you will not typically have access to electricity. It is possible that on occasion there will be a plug, but you should plan on being self-sufficient with a battery pack or something of the kind if you anticipate needing to charge a device.

Health and Medical Information

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that anyone traveling internationally carefully consider which vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary:

- Consider what countries you are traveling through both to and from your course.
- Consult with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other health care professional.

To guard against infection while traveling in a foreign country, routine immunizations should be current. These include tetanus and diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella, and polio. A series of inoculations can take months; we suggest you begin early.

Regulations and recommendations can change. NOLS suggests some specific inoculations based on information from the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC), through consultation with health officials in the specific region of the countries where courses are conducted, and through our experience in the specific country. The final decision about which inoculations you receive is your responsibility. There are many sources of information and some of the information is contradictory. In addition to consulting with your healthcare provider, the following organizations provide useful information:

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control either via the CDC International Travelers Hotline 800-232-4636 or their website: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>.
- International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IMAT), 417 Center St, Lewiston NY 14092, (716) 754-4883.
- Shorelands Travel Health Online: www.tripprep.com.

Inoculations you receive should be recorded in the official document, International Certificate of Vaccination, available from the U.S. Public Health Service or from your doctor. This is also a good place to record your prescriptions, eyeglass needs, medical problems such as allergies, and any other information of a medical nature. Please record your blood type on the front page of this booklet.

Inoculations for India

At this time, there are no inoculations required by India or the United States for entry or re-entry. The CDC recommends the following vaccines (as appropriate for age):

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).

- Hepatitis B if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- Japanese encephalitis, if you plan to visit rural areas during the rainy season or stay longer than 4 weeks.
- Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- Typhoid, particularly if you plan to visit rural areas or stay longer than 6 weeks.
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles, and a one-time dose of polio for adults.

Malaria

As in equatorial regions around the world, malaria exists in India. Malaria is caused by a parasite that is transmitted by infected mosquitos, found in areas below 6,500 ft (2,000 meters). During this trip, we will not be going below this elevation and will not be entering areas known to have Malaria. If you spend time in other parts of India you and your physician should choose a drug regimen for malaria prophylaxis. The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) also has a Malaria Hotline (404) 332-4555.

Traveler's Diarrhea

Diarrhea is by far the most frequent health problem for travelers to India. Traveler's diarrhea is caused by a variety of infectious agents and the spectrum of clinical illness varies considerably. This illness in travelers, however, is usually not severe, and complete recovery often occurs in the absence of treatment.

On NOLS courses, we treat our drinking water and we are careful of what we eat and your instructors will provide guidance on staying healthy. If a significant problem with diarrhea does occur during the course, the instructors carry additional medication to treat the condition in the field or, if needed, the student may be evacuated so the school's Indian physician can provide treatment monitor the individual carefully.

You should carry personal medicines only if prescribed for treatment of existing health conditions disclosed on your health form or if you intend to travel after the course ends. Your instructors will be carrying a comprehensive drug kit that includes prescription medicines for most illnesses that you may encounter in the field.

Passport

You will need a valid passport for the duration of your stay in India PLUS six months. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date. Passports are generally valid for a period of ten years from the issue date.

Regulation passport photographs are required at various stages of preparation for the course. Please bring **six** copies of your photograph and **three** photocopies of the information page of your passport and Indian Tourist Visa kept with your passport for later use. NOLS will need these for the permits we use to operate in the area.

Visa - Apply online

Option 1

International travelers entering India are required to have a visa. e-Tourist visas are available for visits up to 60 days from date of arrival. Please consult the Government of India's website for electronic visa applications and further information. <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

For this trip all you need is to apply for an E visa, please have a minimum of 2 weeks prior to your travel date to get your Indian visa processed.

Option 2 - Apply in person

Note: As of June 21, 2019, the Indian Embassy and Indian Consulate Generals within the U.S. have outsourced the visa collection and delivery process to VSF Global Services (VSF).

To obtain a tourist visa, log onto this website and follow the instructions:

<https://visa.vfsglobal.com/usa/en/ind>.

The visa application will ask for the type of visa requested and the duration; **state that you would like a 1-year TOURIST visa**. These tourist visas are valid for 1 year from the date of issue.

Indian Tourist Visa Requirements for U.S. Citizens (Always check website for most up to date list):

1. A signed passport that is **valid for 6 months beyond the intended stay in India**, with at least two empty pages available for the visa stamp.
2. Two copies of the Indian Visa application, signed by the above passport holder. Note: Signatures are needed under your required photo as well as on the bottom of page two.
3. Passport type photo is needed. Check the website for specifics.
4. Proof of Residential Address; this must match the address used on Indian Visa application.
5. "India Particulars Form"

The visa application asks for "object of journey"; state that you will be traveling for a backpacking trip in Ladakh, *not that you are a student*. NOLS differs from a traditional school and is not recognized by Indian travel authorities as a school.

The visa application will require the name and address of one reference in India. Please use our NOLS India Program Director:

Ravi Kumar
NOLS India
Vania Heritage Cottage, Mall Road
Ranikhet 263645 Uttarakhand, India
Cell phone: 91-9410159900 (91 is the country code)

Attention International European travelers - Must read... Action Required

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This [article](#) explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's [the link](#) for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

Your tuition includes meals starting with dinner on the first night through breakfast on the morning of your departure, camping gear (tents, stoves, kitchens, etc.), safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation to and from your lodging.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Travel pre- or post-trip

Previous NOLS India participants have enjoyed adding a few extra days in India to travel to Agra and see the Taj Mahal. You may want to consider this when making travel arrangements. It is very easy to put together travel plans once in India, so we do not recommend making these arrangements while in the U.S.

Frequently, participants will arrange for travel with Mr. Pawan, who helps with the logistics of many of our NOLS courses. Here's a link to some of the packages offered by his company [Vandana Travels](mailto:tour1@vandanaairtravels.com)
tour1@vandanaairtravels.com

Equipment

Group Gear provided by NOLS

Water Purification	Food	First Aid kits	Emergency Communications
Tents	Cooking gear	Prescription Drug kit	

Your Gear List

Please review this equipment and packing list thoroughly.

Upper Body

Equipment	Notes
Mid weight (fleece top)	Lightweight fleece or a wool sweater. Vests are a great addition also.
Wind Jacket (optional)	A lightweight, nylon wind shell. Hooded wind jackets are recommended. Does not need to be waterproof. These are great to keep bugs off.
Insulating Layer	Heavy weight fleece or a medium weight puffy layer.
T-shirts (1-2)	You can substitute a long sleeve sun shirt here. Wool tends to be the least stinky!
Clean Shirt	Something long sleeve that stays clean to wear in villages or temples.
Rain Jacket	Bring a waterproof, breathable rain jacket.
Sports Bras (1-2)	Should be wool, or synthetic.
Sun Hat, Baseball Cap	A baseball hat, wide-brimmed sun hat, or visor to protect your face and ears from the sun.
Warm Hat	It can be cool in the villages at night.

Temperatures can dip into the 40's at night but will commonly be in the upper 70's during the day.

Lower Body Clothing

Equipment	Notes
Base layer	Mid weight synthetic or wool.
Hiking Pants (1-2 pairs)	Comfortable cotton, nylon, or polypro pants to protect your legs while hiking.

Village Pants	Something that stays clean to wear in the village in the evenings.
Shorts (optional)	Loose fitting, nylon or cotton. Knee length or longer please. Could double as sleepwear.
Underwear (2-4 pairs)	Wool or synthetic are best although some women prefer cotton briefs.
Optional Items	
Rain Pants	Breathable rain pants can also double as wind pants.
Pack a little bit more than you think you need. We'll go over gear together in Leh.	
Footwear	
Equipment	Notes
Hiking Shoes	You will need a sturdy pair of shoes to hike in. Consider low top trail hiking shoes or boots.
Sandals	A comfortable pair of sandals or Crocs that are easy to slip on and off are great for around the villages or temples.
Socks (2-3)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised.
Gaiters	Gaiters that go above the calf are the best for this area. They help keep, plants, mud, and critters out!
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	Notes
Backpack	25-45L daypack to carry your personal gear during the day.
Duffel bag	1-2 Medium size duffels for your gear that will go on the mules.
Sleeping Bag and stuff sack	We recommend either synthetic or down bags. A bag with about 20° F temperature rating is good.
Sleeping Pad	A ¾ or full length closed cell foam or inflatable pad to insulate and pad between the ground and your sleeping bag.
Trekking Poles	We find that most people prefer to have 2 poles
Camp Towel or sarong (optional)	There might occasionally be access to showers. This is not predictable or common though.
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your daypack.
Insulated Mug	12 to 20 oz. insulated mugs with lids.
Bowl	A lightweight bowl with a snap or screw on lid.
Spoon	Lexan spoons are light, durable and popular.
Water Bottles	Bottles with at total capacity of at least 2 Liters.

Lip Balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater.
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater.
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark.
Headlamp	Bring spare batteries.
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Travel or trial sizes are enough.
Watch	A watch with an alarm is a necessary item.
Notepad and Pencil/Pen	A small, lightweight pad is necessary for taking notes.
Optional Items	
Hydration System	Very handy and popular.
Sunglass Retainers	Chums® or Croakies® for keeping track of your glasses or sunglasses.
Pocket Knife	Not needed. Should you want to bring one, please choose a very small knife or multi-tool.
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read.
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Coffee	Starbucks VIA Ready Brew packets that are quick and easy to use if you need a coffee fix.
Travel Gear	
Equipment	Notes
Luggage	Whatever luggage you need for traveling to/from India. This could be your backpack.
City clothes	1-2 changes of clothes for wearing in the city. These can be left behind in Leh.
Passport	Valid for at least 6 months after the trip. 2 Copies of the passport also.