

A Guide to Himachal

This 15-day expedition is one of India's most extreme and rewarding road circuits — crossing multiple high passes, remote valleys, and the world's highest motorable road at **Umling La (5,883 m)**. From the monasteries of Zaskar to the moonscapes of Hanle and the alpine lakes of Tso Moriri, this loop blends altitude, culture, and raw Himalayan scale.

Trip Overview

Duration: 15 Days

Best Season: July to September (*roads open; Umling La accessible*)

Total Distance: ~2,000–2,200 km

Vehicle Type: 4x4 SUV or high-clearance ADV bike (*essential for Shinkula, Hanle, Umling La*)

Difficulty: Very Challenging (*altitude, terrain, fuel planning, remoteness*)

Permits: Inner Line Permit (ILP) required for Hanle, Umling La, Tso Moriri (*apply online or in Leh*)

Mobile Network: BSNL/Jio in Keylong, Padum, Leh; no signal in Hanle, Umling La, Tso Moriri

Fuel Planning: Pumps in Manali, Keylong, Padum, Leh; carry 40–60 L spare for Hanle–Umling La–Tso Moriri leg

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Manali → Keylong

- **Distance/Time:** ~120 km | 4–5 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Cross **Atal Tunnel** into Lahaul
 - Visit **Sissu Waterfall, Keylong Monastery**
 - **Stay:** Keylong
 - **Tip:** Acclimatize slowly — altitude gain begins here
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Day 2: Keylong → Shinkula Pass → Zaskar Sumdo

- **Distance/Time:** ~150 km | 6–7 hrs
- **Pass:** Shinkula Pass (5,091 m)
- **Highlights:**

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- Remote ascent into Zaskar Valley
 - Camp at **Zaskar Sumdo** or nearby village
 - **Stay:** Camp
 - **Tip:** Carry water and snacks — no shops en route
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Day 3: Zaskar Sumdo → Padum

- **Distance/Time:** ~100 km | 4–5 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Drive through **Purne, Phuktal Monastery trailhead**
 - Arrival in **Padum** — Zaskar’s cultural capital
 - **Stay:** Padum
 - **Tip:** Visit **Karsha Monastery** and **Zangla Fort**
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Day 4–5: Padum exploration + buffer

- **Options:**
 - Trek to **Phuktal Monastery** (*1-day hike*)
 - Visit **Stongdey Monastery, Zangla Palace**
 - **Stay:** Padum
 - **Tip:** Use buffer for weather or acclimatization
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Day 6: Padum → Lingshed → Hanle

- **Distance/Time:** ~250 km | 8–10 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Remote drive through **Lingshed, Photoksar**, and **Singe La**
 - Arrival in **Hanle** — India’s highest observatory
 - **Stay:** Hanle homestay
 - **Tip:** Stargazing is exceptional — minimal light pollution
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Day 7: Hanle → Umling La → Hanle

- **Distance/Time:** ~150 km round trip | 6–7 hrs
 - **Pass: Umling La (5,883 m)** — world's highest motorable road
 - **Highlights:**
 - Barren moonscapes, extreme altitude
 - Border zone views (*no photography near military posts*)
 - **Stay:** Hanle
 - **Caution:** Drive slow; monitor for AMS symptoms
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Day 8: Hanle → Nyoma → Tso Moriri

- **Distance/Time:** ~150 km | 5–6 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Drive through **Nyoma, Mahe Bridge**
 - Arrival at **Tso Moriri Lake** — alpine lake at 4,522 m
 - **Stay:** Karzok village
 - **Tip:** Photography best at sunrise and sunset
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Day 9: Tso Moriri → Tso Kar → Pang

- **Distance/Time:** ~150 km | 5–6 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Tso Kar salt lake**, wildlife spotting
 - Camp at **Pang**
 - **Stay:** Pang camp
 - **Tip:** Carry warm gear — nights are freezing
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Day 10: Pang → Sarchu

- **Distance/Time:** ~80 km | 3–4 hrs
- **Highlights:**

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- Cross **Lachung La, Nakee La, Gata Loops**
 - Arrival at **Sarchu** — border of Himachal and Ladakh
 - **Stay:** Sarchu camp
 - **Tip:** Acclimatize before Baralacha La ascent
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Day 11: Sarchu → Baralacha La → Keylong

- **Distance/Time:** ~120 km | 4–5 hrs
 - **Pass:** Baralacha La (4,890 m)
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Suraj Tal, Deepak Tal**
 - **Stay:** Keylong
 - **Tip:** Fuel up for return leg
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Day 12–15: Return via Manali + buffer

- **Options:**
 - Rest days, weather buffer, or detour to **Naggar, Jispa, or Sissu**
 - **Finish:** Manali (*trip end*)
 - **Tip:** Visit **Hadimba Temple** or **Jogini Falls**
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Essentials to Carry

- **Documents:** DL, RC, insurance, ID proofs, ILP for Hanle/Umling La
- **Clothing:** Layered warm gear, gloves, down jacket
- **Footwear:** Waterproof trekking shoes
- **Health:** Diamox, ORS, portable oxygen, AMS meds
- **Gear:** Tyre inflator, puncture kit, tow strap, jerrycans (40–60 L), headlamps, power banks
- **Navigation:** Offline maps, paper backup of routes
- **Misc:** Sunglasses, SPF 50+, lip balm, snacks, thermos

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✔ Permits, Fuel & Checkpoints

- **Permits:**
 - ILP required for Hanle, Umling La, Tso Moriri (*apply online or in Leh*)
 - **Fuel:**
 - Reliable pumps: Manali, Keylong, Padum, Leh
 - Carry 40–60 L spare for Hanle–Umling La–Tso Moriri leg
 - **Checkpoints:**
 - Army and ITBP checks near Hanle and Umling La
 - **Timing Tips:**
 - Umling La best crossed before noon
 - Avoid driving after dark in high-altitude zones
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💡 Insider Tips

- **Best season:** July–September for full circuit access
 - **Photography:** Umling La summit, Tso Moriri reflections, Phuktal Monastery trail
 - **Local eats:** Try thukpa in Padum, butter tea in Hanle, and Ladakhi bread in Karzok
 - **Eco-ethic:** No littering; respect monastery zones and wildlife corridors
 - **Road caution:** Shinkula, Hanle, and Umling La stretches require extreme caution
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📍 Route Map Overview (Text)

Manali → Keylong → Shinkula Pass → Zaskar Sumdo → Padum → Lingshed → Hanle → Umling La → Nyoma → Tso Moriri → Tso Kar → Pang → Sarchu → Baralacha La → Keylong → Manali