

A Guide to Himachal

From the apple orchards of Kullu to the wind-carved gorges of Zaskar, the monastery-crowned ridges of Ladakh, the turquoise sweep of Pangong, and the star-studded skies of Hanle — this 13–14 day loop is the Himalayas at their most extreme and exhilarating. It's a journey of high passes, remote valleys, and once-in-a-lifetime roads — starting and ending in Manali.

Trip overview

Duration: 13–14 Days

Best Season: Mid-June to late-September (Shinku La, Singe La–Sirsir La, Umling La open)

Total Distance: ~1,800–2,000 km (with detours)

Vehicle Type: 4x4 or high-clearance SUV; experienced rider for bikes (500+ cc recommended)

Difficulty: Challenging (high altitude, rough tracks, water crossings, long fuel stretches)

Permits: Ladakh Inner Line Permit (ILP) for Nubra, Pangong, Hanle, Chushul, Umling La, Tso Moriri

Mobile Network: Jio/BSNL in towns; no signal on remote legs (Shinku La, Singe/Sirsir La, Hanle–Umling La)

Fuel Planning: Longest dry stretches are Nubra → Pangong → Hanle → Tso Moriri; carry 20–30 L spare

Day-by-day itinerary

Day 1: Manali → Atal Tunnel → Keylong/Jispa

- **Distance/Time:** ~100–135 km | 3–5 hrs
- **Highlights:** Atal Tunnel climate shift, Sissu waterfall, Keylong market.
- **Adventure:** Evening walk to Sissu lake.
- **Stay:** Jispa (3,200 m) for acclimatization.
- **Tip:** Fuel up at Tandi — last reliable pump before Zaskar.

Day 2: Jispa → Darcha → Shinku La → Padum (Zaskar)

- **Distance/Time:** ~210 km | 8–10 hrs
- **Pass:** Shinku La (≈5,091 m)
- **Highlights:** Snow walls (early season), turquoise streams, Zaskar entry.
- **Adventure:** Short glacier-view walks (only if acclimatized).

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- **Stay:** Padum (3,530 m)
- **Caution:** Start early to cross streams before they swell.

Day 3: Padum acclimatization + Zaskar explorations

- **Highlights:** Karsha, Stongdey, Sani monasteries; rope bridges; Zaskar river banks.
- **Adventure:** Half-day ridge trek above Karsha; short rafting (seasonal).
- **Stay:** Padum
- **Tip:** Carry cash; ATMs/fuel are unreliable.

Day 4: Padum → Singe La → Sirsir La → Lamayuru → Leh

- **Distance/Time:** ~270–310 km | 10–12 hrs
- **Passes:** Singe La (≈5,000 m), Sirsir La (≈4,780 m)
- **Highlights:** Cliff roads, moonscapes, Lamayuru monastery and “Moonland”.
- **Stay:** Leh (3,500 m)
- **Tip:** Pre-dawn departure from Padum.

Day 5: Leh rest + culture loop

- **Highlights:** Thiksey sunrise, Hemis frescoes, Shey palace, Leh market.
- **Adventure:** Sunset cycle to Shanti Stupa.
- **Stay:** Leh
- **Permits:** Ensure ILP covers Nubra, Shyok route, Pangong (via Chushul), Hanle, Umling La, Tso Moriri.

Day 6: Leh → Khardung La → Diskit → Hunder (Nubra Valley)

- **Distance/Time:** ~120 km | 5–6 hrs
- **Pass:** Khardung La (≈5,359 m)
- **Highlights:** Diskit monastery, Hunder dunes.
- **Adventure:** ATV rides, Bactrian camel safari, zipline.
- **Stay:** Hunder/Diskit

Day 7: Hunder → Turtuk → return Hunder/Diskit

- **Distance/Time:** ~170–200 km round trip | 6–7 hrs

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- **Highlights:** Turtuk's Balti culture, apricot orchards; Thang viewpoint (permissions vary).
- **Adventure:** Village heritage walk and wooden bridges.
- **Stay:** Hunder/Diskit

Day 8: Nubra → Shyok River road → Pangong (Spangmik)

- **Distance/Time:** ~170–200 km | 6–8 hrs
- **Highlights:** Shyok gorges, river fords, Pangong's changing blues.
- **Adventure:** Lakeside sunset walks, astrophotography (clear/new moon best).
- **Stay:** Spangmik/Man/Merak

Day 9: Pangong → Chushul → Tsaga La → Loma → Hanle

- **Distance/Time:** ~170–200 km | 6–8 hrs
- **Checkpoints/Pass:** Chushul, Tsaga La, Loma
- **Highlights:** Rezang La War Memorial, Changthang wildlife (kiang), Hanle Observatory.
- **Adventure:** Night-sky photography; constellation walk.
- **Stay:** Hanle
- **Note:** Respect no-photography zones near sensitive areas.

Day 10: Hanle → Umling La (day trip) → return Hanle

- **Distance/Time:** ~170–200 km round trip | 6–8 hrs
- **Pass:** Umling La (≈5,800+ m)
- **Highlights:** Stark high-altitude desert, summit prayer flags.
- **Adventure:** Minimal exertion summit shots if fully acclimatized.
- **Stay:** Hanle
- **Caution:** Monitor SpO2; carry portable oxygen.

Day 11: Hanle → Nyoma → Mahe → Tso Moriri (Korzok)

- **Distance/Time:** ~160–180 km | 5–7 hrs
- **Highlights:** Wetlands and birdlife (seasonal black-necked cranes), Korzok monastery, Tso Moriri's deep blues.
- **Adventure:** Ridge walk above Korzok for panoramas.

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- **Stay:** Korzok

Day 12: Tso Moriri → Tso Kar → Debring → More Plains → Pang/Sarchu

- **Distance/Time:** ~220–260 km | 7–9 hrs
- **Highlights:** Tso Kar salt flats, More Plains' long straights, Nakee La, Lachulung La, Gata Loops.
- **Adventure:** Controlled-speed photography stops; expect strong crosswinds.
- **Stay:** Pang/Sarchu (or push to Jispa if you want lower altitude)

Day 13: Pang/Sarchu → Baralacha La → Jispa/Keylong → Manali

- **Distance/Time:** ~230–260 km | 8–10 hrs
- **Pass:** Baralacha La (≈4,890 m); Deepak Tal, Zingzing Bar
- **Highlights:** Glacier streams, Lahaul farewell scenes.
- **Finish:** Manali (trip end)



Essentials to carry

- **Documents:** DL, RC, PUC, insurance, ILP printouts (5–6), ID proofs; passport for foreign nationals
- **Clothing:** Layering system (thermal, fleece, windproof), down jacket, gloves, beanie, neck gaiter
- **Footwear:** Waterproof trekking shoes, spare socks
- **Health:** Doctor-advised Diamox, personal meds, ORS, basic first-aid, portable oxygen can, oximeter
- **Gear:** Tyre inflator, puncture kit, tow strap, jump cables, jerrycans (20–30 L), headlamps, power banks, Type-C/USB cables
- **Navigation:** Offline maps (download entire region), paper backup of routes and emergency contacts
- **Misc:** Category 3/4 sunglasses, SPF 50+, lip balm, wet wipes, thermos, high-energy snacks



Permits, fuel and checkpoints

- **Permits (ILP):**

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- **Sectors to tick:** Nubra (Khardung, Shyok), Pangong (via Durbuk/Chushul), Hanle, Umling La, Tso Moriri (Nyoma–Mahe–Korzok).
- **Copies:** Carry 5–6 sets for South Pullu, North Pullu, Khalsar, Tangste, Chushul, Tsaga, Loma, Nyoma, Mahe, and random checks.
- **Fuel plan:**
 - **Reliable pumps:** Tandi (before Jispa), Karu (near Leh), Diskit (Nubra).
 - **Variable/occasional:** Tangste (Pangong side), Nyoma/Chumathang (infrequent).
 - **Dry stretches:** Nubra → Pangong → Hanle → Tso Moriri. Carry 20–30 L spare; refuel wherever available.
- **Timing strategy:**
 - **Early starts (6–7 am):** For Shinku La, Singe/Sirsir La, Umling La; streams rise post-noon.
 - **Weather windows:** Expect afternoon winds at Pangong/Changthang; aim to reach camps by 3–4 pm.
- **Conduct:**
 - **Checkposts:** Keep permits/IDs handy; be polite and patient.
 - **Sensitive zones:** Follow no-drone/no-photo rules; respect wildlife corridors.

Insider tips

- **Acclimatize wisely:** Two nights split across Jispa/Padum/Leh before pushing Umling La. Avoid alcohol and heavy exertion early on.
 - **Drive craft:** Give way on the mountainside; flash/honk before blind bends; walk water crossings first if unsure.
 - **Cold management:** Windchill at passes is brutal — keep a warm layer in the front seat to throw on instantly.
 - **Eco-ethic:** No littering, no off-roading on wetlands/lake shores, carry back all plastic.
 - **Photography:** Best light is early and late; mid-day is for moving between locations.
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Route map overview (text)

Manali → Atal Tunnel → Keylong/Jispa → Darcha → Shinku La → Padum (Zaskar) → Singe La → Sirsir La → Lamayuru → Leh → Khardung La → Diskit/Hunder → Turtuk → Shyok road → Pangong (Spangmik/Man/Merak) → Chushul → Tsaga La → Loma → Hanle → Umling La (day trip) → Hanle → Nyoma → Mahe → Tso Moriri (Korzok) → Tso Kar → Debring → More Plains → Pang/Sarchu → Baralacha La → Jispa → Atal Tunnel → Manali