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Finally Leh(d)

Our road trip with kids to the mighty Himalayas

Tour Route - Delhi - Kud - Srinagar - Sonamarg - Kargil - Leh - Pangong - Nubra - Sarchu - Manali - Delhi

Total No of days - 15

Dated - June 2011

Behind the wheel
Vinod Kumar
New Delhi



We had been planning this trip since 2009. Got postponed due to various reasons. But this year we were more like we have to do it for sure. So the summer vacation was planned for a 15 day Leh trip.

When ever I do a road trip ,Good hotel stay and confirmed booking is a must, so started emailing costing to many tour operators, including a couple of Tour agents from Leh whom I had met at an exhibition in 2009. Costing were on a higher side, thought of serious negotiations, but we were not firm on the number of days of our visit and dates yet. Days passed and vacations started for the kids.

On 11th night I casually called Club Mahindra Manali to enquire room availability at Manali and to my surprise, they told me it was available for 28, 29, & 30th. Immediately locked for 28th and 29th. Next I contacted Active Adventure, Leh - the guy whom I had been communicating for almost 4 months about our trip, give him the firm dates as below

- 1st day stay at Kud Tourist Bungalow
- 2nd day drive to Srinagar and night stay at Centur Lake view, Dal Lake
- Sightseeing around Srinagar
- Drive down to Sonamarg and night stay at Hotel Hill View
- Drive to Kargil and night stay at Hotel Siachen
- Onward journey to Leh and stay at Gwaling International
- Rest and around Leh
- Drive to Pangong and stay at Nature Nest (Tents)
- Back to Leh
- Drive to Nubra and stay at Hotel Olthang
- Back to Leh
- Drive to Sarchu and stay at Goldrop (Tents)
- Drive to Manali and stay at Club Mahindra Snow Peaks
- Rest at Manali
- Drive back to Delhi

2 days reserved for negotiaion and finally all bookings were done and the deal was closed by 4 days of our travel.

Day 1

Timing summary

Started at 4.30 Am. Not much traffic at Delhi border. We reahed Sonepat real fast.

Panipat - 05.30

Ambala - 06.50

Kharar - 07.55

Breakfast break at Ropar - Balachor highway - 08.30 near DCM Factory. Bamboo Shade.

Garhshankar - 10.00

Hoshiarpur - 10.45

Dasuya - 11.40

Pathankot - 12.35

Lunch - Nirulas

Lakhanpur Border - 2 Pm - Take slip for Rs 130. It is valid at Qzigund.

Dayal Chak - (32 kms from Lakhanpur border) Sign - Midway Hotel, Petrol Pumps. (Turn Right). This small road of 85 kms take via Gadak,Challan, Khoon and Manwal connect exit of Udhampur.

First 30kms is not so good, after that its fun to drive. No/least traffic.

Not advisable after 6.p.m. Lonely road.

Kishenpur - 3.30 pm

Udhampur - 4.40 pm

Kud - 5.30 PM. (Tourist Bungalow, JK Tourism)

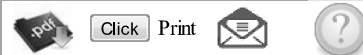
Our first stop.

Total distance - 680 kms, 2 stops, 13hrs.

Kud is famious for Patisa. It was real mothwatering. Must taste/buy stuff.

About Tourist Bungalow - Big rooms with basic facility. Liked the place. Cost : Rs 850/- for the night. But loads of dust!

Day - 2



Finally Leh(d) (Leh & Ladakh)

Location - Jammu & Kashmir in India

Ideal time to Visit - June to August

No of Days Reqd to see Leh - 15 - 20 days

Places to See - [click here](#)

Road Travel Information to Leh

[Route map from Delhi & Mumbai](#)

[Travel Journals/Travelogue](#)

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[Hotel Info](#)

General Entry : 22:00

Titnatic View Point

Qzigund : 12:45 - Check post. Slip was valid.

Anantnag : 13:00

Avantipora : 01:45

Srinagar : 02:10

Distance Covered : 220 kms, 5.5 hrs.

High traffic after Qzigund. Didnt find any traffic block for the whole route. The whole route was unique with rainy clouds and glistening trees. The entire route has roads cut through mountains and the drive takes you to the realms of a untouched or unexploited land. In between we could not find much restaurants, hence stopped by a small road side dhaba, which was neat and there were 2 men who had prepared rajma and rice early in the morning to welcome their visitors. Nothing can beat that tasty breakfast with the scenic view and a huge convoy of 55 army truck that passed through. Onward too it was overcast and raining intermittently. Srinagar is a beautiful place, the shikaras, the lake in its full beauty, the lush green trees and mountains in the backdrop and the quizzing traffic. Had lunch at Hotel Paradise. Nothing much noteworthy about the place. Drove and took a circle around the Dal lake.

By the time our local rep Manzoor arrived to receive us. Checked in at Centur Lake View by 3.30 pm. Rested for an hour and then went for the famous Shikara ride and visited the floating market. Be very careful with your purchases here as you can be cheated on the material. Tough bargaining is a must.

Strolled around Boulevard Road in the evening. This is the happening place at night and has the max no of hotels. There are food stalls, roadside vendors etc and they reach their peak in the evening. After a rest of 1 hr, we set-out for the famous Shikara ride. Drive around a bit and parked at Faraaz multicuisine restaurant. The ride is very enjoyable and did for around 3 hrs including 1 hr at floating market. You can sit hours besides the lake.

Places to see in Srinagar

- Dal Lake
- Shankaracharya Temple - Entry only upto 5.pm
- Hazratbal Shrine
- Mughal Garden.

Around Srinagar

Pahalgam - 100ks - didnt visit

Gulmarg - 60 kms - Worlds highest Goldola. Most scenic drive

Wular lake (Many recommended this place) if dubbed with Gulmarg can be done along with it - Didnt go.

Sonamarg - 80 kms - Night halt. Trek to thajivas glacier must do.

Day- 3

We had to choose between Pahalgam or Gulmarg. We came to know from the reception that the ropeway(Gondola) was open (it was shut for repair)

If lucky phase-2 too will be open. So it was an unanimous decision to see Gulmarg. We were also tipped that the Pony union will not allow outside vehicle inside Gulmarg/Gondola the ropeway, one has to park at parking (entry) and has to either walk 3kms or hire the pony.

Solution : Get hold of a guide, ask him to make a temp reservation voucher for hotels near the ropeway, show at checkpoint and you are in. Will cost any thing between 500 to 1000 bcks (Negotiate hard) but will be cheaper than the pony and will save atleast 2 hrs. Also the climate is very unpredictable can rain any time.

Where to catch hold the guide, A Check post before Gulmarg last 10 kms climb, one has to pay Rs 50/-. As we reached the checkpost, got hold of a guide and closed deal for 600 bugs. Deal manage vehicle entry, Get in parked safely, tickets (300 Adults, 150 kids), bypass gandola queue (Phase-1) Usually the wait period can be upto 30 min.

Bingo he got the voucher for hotel, we were allowed in after checking the voucher and a entry fee of Rs 50. Once in you cross this check post, one can roam free around in your vehicle. It was a fantastic drive around absolute awesome views, less traffic only buses & of course local tourist. We drove around for 1 hr. The guide showed us many spots where Bollywood shooting took place I remember a few one is Bobby. Song "Jai Jai shiv shankar", dont remember the film name, Dharmendra movie too was shot here and some more names don't remember exactly.

By the time we were at Gondola, the climate changed it was overcast and it could rain any time. Quickly parked the beast by the time the guide, got the tickets, bypassed the queue (local contacts) and we are quickly on the gondola for Phase-1. Gondola was long it took good 15 min to reach our 1st destination.

Our bad luck, Phase-2 was temporarily suspended due to bad weather and there was already huge line for phase-2. we roamed around for an hour and half, returned back as it started raining.

By 5.30 we reached back at Srinagar. Did another shikara ride, by evening we are at our hotel. Its time to say bye to Srinagar, tomorrow the journey continues destination "Sonamarg"

Food tasted : Sheek kababs, Rogan Josh, Deep fired chickens. Served with Khaboos(Similar) along with Akrot Chutney. - Awesome.

Day - 4 - Sonamarg

Sonamarg is a major base for Amarnath Yatra (Baltal) and also a popular trekking base. Today's plan, reach by 1 at the hotel, visit Thajivas glacier post lunch. Our booking was at Hill view, which is a newer hotel opposite the police station after the market. Other hotels I remember were JKTDC hotel, Hotel Snowland and Sonmarg Glacier.

Set out for Sonamarg (The meadow of gold) by 8.30 am. Around 20kms drive from Srinagar you reach Ganderbal which I felt is a major repair hub with lot of spare parts shops and service centers. Another 10kms drive further we were at Shidh view dhaba which is around 30 kms after Srinagar which is a good location for Morning breakfast beside the Sindh river. Spent around an hour there. There was a checkpost 3 kms after this dhaba where Vehicle no and name has to be logged. Another 10kms drive you reach Kangan. Most of the people who live in Sonamarg trek down to Kangan during Nov - March as snow falls. From here another 40 kms drive is there for Sonmarg passing small villages. Road condition is average. Widening is in progress. At places it narrow too just on vehicle at a time and overall progress is slow. Add to this is the movement of army vehicles. Just 8 kms before Sonamarg, there is a small park besides the Sindh river and is a good stop over. Reached there by 11.30 am spent an hour and headed to our hotel. Hotel was neat and staff were very caring and food was good. We had an AP plan. Here too the same problem, one cannot take own vehicle till the base of Thajivas glacier so hired a taxi, he charged Rs 800 for the same. Its a good 5 to 6 kms drive from the market till the glacier. Then again around 2 km trek one way.

It was a nice experience. Due to large turnover of tourist, ice is almost muddy, and dirty. But worth a visit. The view is awesome. Spent around 2 hrs and were back by 5.30 at hotel. Here too while returning it rained, Thankgod we had waterproof jackets which saved the day. So plan water proof dresses during your visit here, also even if it doesn't rain the air is so humid that it wets your clothes.

exactly after 7 kms there is a bypass which will avoid traffic from Kargil and meet at India gate. Since it rained previous night, the army guy posted near the bypass told not to take that route. After a couple of kms we were stopped again as an army convoy was coming. After 30 min stoppage we started again , final dimb was challenging. No roads virtually. Potholes and rather craters had to be pedaled through. After another 10 kms, the road was good. We passed Gumri, Zozila War Memorial, Mena Marg Police Checkpost, Draupadi Kund and hit Drass by 12.50 pm. Our next destination was The War memorial.

Zozila to Drass section is very beautiful. It is a photographers paradise. Our midway stop over was at The War memorial, Homage to our heroes of Kargil war. Spent around 1 hr there, general chit chat with army guys there. Bought mementoes caps and Tshirts. It is truly a must visit to pay ones homage to the war heroes who made us proud. Jai Hind!

Continued our journey to Kargil aound 2.30 , passed Bhimbat village, Thasgo and finally were at Kargil, Hotel Siachen by 5 pm. The entire ride was uneventful. Roads widening in progress and dusty to mention.

Day - 6 - Leh

Stay at Hotel Siachen was comfortable. Neat rooms and good service. Definety recommended. Morning 8.30 am we are ready to continue our journey. Packed lunch was provided by the hotel guys , hence no specific target for a restaurant was required. There was a 15 minute wait at the petrol pump due to the long queue.

Crossed Pashkum - 13kms - 9.15 am
Another 3 kms : 30 min holdup due to GREF work
Mulbek : 28 kms at 10:35 (Saw Indian oil pump)
Namik La - Road is good till last few kms.
Kangaral : 25 kms : 11.20
Bodhi Karbu : 10 kms 11:50 - road good, big monastery, yak breeding farm, Road newly tarred.
Fotula @ 13353 fts : 20 kms 12:25 - Roads bad, first view of Lamayaru.
Main road was dosed for work : took by pass. Narrow but ok.
Khalste : 38 kms : 1320 - Ideal for lunch break, restaurants, hospital, petrol pump
Nurula : 14 kms : 1340 hrs : Took lunch break. 20 min
Saspol : 23kms 1440 hrs
Basgo : 18 kms 15:10 hrs
Nimo army area : 6 kms 1520 hrs
Gurdwara Pathar Sahib : 13 kms : 15:35 : Road very good
Magnetic hill : spent 20 min

FINALLY LEH(ED) : 30kms 17:15 pm. - Gwaling Intemationl .

Kargil - Leh drive was more fun to drive mainly due to better road condition.

About the Hotel Gwaling Intl, it was around 0.7 kms from SBI atm at lower Changspa. Walk to market is 15 min. Our room was big with extra space for extra bed/person. Large bathroom with tub. Good garden in front. Overall nice stay experience. Staff was cooperative and food quality too was good. Highly recommended. Evening we went around to familiarise with Leh market and roads. Next day was for car checkup , around Leh.

Day - 7 - Leh & Around

This day was rest day and for the Permit (to be managed by the Travel Agent, FOC) one needs to submit the original ID for permit. Was arranged by evening for Pangong & Nubra. You will need 2 copies for each destination. Also need to write Name, Vehide number, Vehide name, DL Number, Number of passenger. This need to be written when submitting at the checkpost. If already written you can save time at the check posts.

There were no AMS , only I had a mild headache and the rest three were all fit and fine. Todays agenda, get the beast washed, filter cleaned then visit Hall of Fame, Shanti Stupa & explore the market.

We left Hotel by 11 am. Saw Hall of Fame (As 1 to 2.30 pm is lunch,is dosed), then went to TELCO Service for a car wash. Already 4 vehicles were in queue. Car wash consumed a lot of time by 4 pm we headed to Shanti Stupa. Spend around an hour here and then back to hotel.

About the market : Lot of options for nick nack shopping. 2 Atms - SBI (Always crowded) and PNB little after SBI atm. Also a new HDFC ATM too will be functional may be in a months time. Parking is free after 8 pm in the market , otherwise is a no parking zone.

Day - 8-9 - Leh - Pangong - Leh

All were excited for our Pangong Tso and Chang La visit. Our night stay at Nature Nest on the banks of the lake at Spagmik village. This village is another 6 kms from the check post at Pangong lake. Last 3 km one has to drive through pebbles and stones besides the lake. Accommodation(Tents) was good with attached bathrooms. Hot water was provided in buckets. Other facilities were basic. Food was good, Staff very helpfull. Local pco is the only way of communication. Tents were properly insulated. Climate was windy and chilly. Post 5 pm its very cold. Proper warm cloths are advised.

Overall drive is good. Chang la pass , last 10 kms both sides are bad and difficult. Overall road are good. Bad patches after Lukung. Lot of dips and water passes after Tangsay. Reached Pangong by 2.45 pm. We roamed around till 8 pm. IMO night stay is must at pangong. Its very beautify at night. Never saw the sky so beautiful with so many stars. Kids enjoyed the star gazing at night.

Next day morning while returning we spent 1 hr at Lukung. The white sand desert is very beautiful, We also saw Marmot (larger version squirrel) and it became very friendly. Also saw brown headed gulls, horses, fox (very far) and yak. Reached Leh by 1.30 pm.

Start : 09.30 am
Karu : 37 kms - 10:20
After Karu : Permit Checkpost.
Shakti : 10 kms 10:46
Zingral : 21kms 11:50
Chang La : 12kms 12:20
Tsoltak : 8km 12:50
Durbuk : 23km 13:15
Chekpost : II Permit submission
Tangsay : 18km 13:50
Lukung : 24kms 14:20
Pangong:Spangmik : 17kms 14:45

Day - 10-11 - Leh - Nubra Valley - Leh

Start at 08:30 in the morning. So finally today we will ascent the Highest motorable pass and I was little excited. Here also 2 copies of permit is required to be submitted at South and North Pullu. Road after South Pullu to North Pullu is bad. Last 4 kms really test the driving skills from both sides. Post North pullu the roads are good.

North Pulu : 15kms 11:50 (15 min stopage due to GREF at work) (Hospital/Tea coffee shops)
Khardung : 18kms 12:20
Khalsar : 24km 13:00
Diskit : HolTel Olthang : 20km 13:40

Hotel was at the entry to Diskit town oppsite Diskit monastery. Hotel was good with 30 odd rooms. Staff were very friendly. Food was average. During the whole trip the Dal - Chawal comby was untimate. Post lunch by around 3.30 went to Hunder which was another 10kms from hotel. Spent the evening at Hunder where kids enjoyed the camel ride on the Double humped (Bactrian camels). By 6 pm we visited Maitreya (Future Budha), a beautiful idol. One can get a good view of Nubra from the height.

Return journey on Sunday was unevenful wasnt much traffic too. Were at Leh by 1 pm. We skipped Sumur, Panamik. May be next time.

Day - 12 Leh - Sarchu

Finally started our return journey. We were mentally prepared for the tough day as roads were bad + over night stay at Sarchu in a tent. Hotel guys timely packed our lunch by 7.30 am we too were ready to depart 7.45 am.

Start : 07:45
Upshi : 08:40 - 65kms It was real fast. Roads were good. A fter Upshi Toll : Rs 70/- was paid. Road after Upshi till Tanglala is bad intermittently. Widening in progress.
Lato : 08:50 - 8 kms
Rumtse : 09:40 - 20 kms
Tanglala : 11:00 - 28 kms - from last 15kms before Tanglala till Mori plains from the pass is in bad shape. Very bad. Lot of snow.
Mori Planis : 11:45 - 25 kms - Widening and repair in progress. Dusty and in bad shape. After 20 odd kms road is good.
Pang : 13.10 - 50 kms - World highest army transit camp @ 15768 fts. Good resting place. We took lunch break. (After Pang, road is even worse)
Kanglajal : 14:30 12 kms (This water cross is difficult. There was lot of water and its a bit scary. I rate it as most difficult.
Lachlungla : 15:15 14 kms - Bad roads
Nakila : 15:45 13 kms - Ditto
Gata loops : 16:20 - Interesting . Roads were better. Jumped couple of them. 21 hair pins
Twing Twing bridge : Roads are good after gata loops.
Sarchu : 45 kms : 17:30.

Tiring journey , Sarchu was windy and chilly. Checked to Goldrop Swiss tents. Freshened up and went around but by the time the sun went down we headed back to our tents.

Day - 13 Sarchu - Manali

Were ready early as we were told that Rohtang might be closed from 11am-4pm for maintenance and expect high traffic after 4pm. Now on every Tuesday will be a maintenance day. Also a family from Delhi told that they were stuck for a good 9 hrs at Rohtang and only could make till Jispa the previous day. Also there are 4 to 5 water crosses too of which some of them has huge volumes of water. Some times the water level rises suddenly.

Start : 08:15
Barlacha pass : 26 kms 09:30 am. Roads bad. Tons of snow. Beautiful & monotone.
Zing Zing Bar : 22 kms 10:25 am Roads average.
Darcha : 25 kms 11:15 am
Jespa : 7 kms 11:30 am (Lots of staying option.)
Keylong : 23 kms 12:05
Tadi : 8 kms : 12:35 (IOC Pump)
Sisu : 23kms 13:05 (Roads are good)
Khoskar : 15kms 13:40 (We were stopped for 2 hrs) Lunch beak. Started again by 3.40
Rohtang : 20 kms 17:10 (Lots of opposite traffic). Heavy rain, land slide. Stuck again 1.5 hrs.
Manali : 55 kms 20.00 hrs : Club mahindra snow peak. (Roads after Marhi village is good but narrow)

Thanked god for the safe trip. 29th was rest day. 30th Morning we started our last leg by 6.30 am and reached Delhi by 7.10 pm. Uneventful drive. Swarghat had lots of craters. Traffic was light between Ambala - Panipat.

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