



VCIL TRAVEL SCHOOL HANDBOOK

LADAKH 2025



Mindful Travel &
Sustainable Living



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- Đèo Khardung La

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Image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh III

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Ladakh is a very popular name among travelers around the world. It is the land of awe-inspiring buildings set so deeply into the barren mountainside. In every direction are mountains and steep passes that are 3000m above the sea level. The azure sky is known as "earthly heaven" plus the extreme weather is an exotic challenge for brave hearts. Ladakh, also called "Little Tibet", extends from the Karakoram range to the main Great Himalaya and was mentioned in many documentaries as a land of happiness and sustainable living regardless of the harsh condition of its climate. In the past, Ladakh used to be a major center for merchants on the famous Silk Road. With its special tactical location on the Himalaya, Ladakh bridges the gap between Centre and Southern Asia, Eastern and Western Asia as well as Muslim and Buddhist nations.

Ladakh was remaining untouched to the rest of the world until 1974. Since the Indian government encouraged tourism there, Ladakh continually in its "development" process attracts not only tourists but also many curious researchers, filmmakers, scholars, NGOs to voyage to study and work, then share its insight to the larger world. Especially after the invasion of China over Tibet, Ladakh became a resource for studying Tibet culture. Because of not only its close ancestral connection to Tibet but also the majority of people follow Tibetan Buddhism and it is a home for many Tibetan refugees. Muslims also enhance the richness and diversity of Ladakh in terms of culture and heritage.

Today, Ladakh is a strategic military hub of the Indian army because it is a junction between Pakistan and China where political conflict is still prominent. Basecamp is ubiquitous here. On the other hand, as the Ladakhis' economy relies heavily on mass tourism, the self-sufficient lifestyle characterized by sustainable rock building techniques has faded away. Tons of hotels and guest houses made of concrete and steel rapidly appeared everywhere. Rarely are tourists spending enough time and experience to connect with local people and places so that they can understand the consequence of mass tourism, climate change, unsustainable development as well as effort from local and international friends in re-constructing and regenerating this brilliant land.

We were shocked when a Ladakhi friend exclaimed: "There are no Ladakhis in photos of tourists visiting Ladakh". VCIL Travel School - Mindful Travel & Sustainable Living was born to change this status quo. We aimed to present a deeper and more thorough image of Ladakh so that both tourists and local people are benefited from learning-based tourism. It wants to contribute to tourism and economic activities of this place to become more sustainable as well as learning some solutions that Ladakhis have implemented about climate change adaptation, natural building, renewable energy and healthy food in the backdrop of fierce climate.

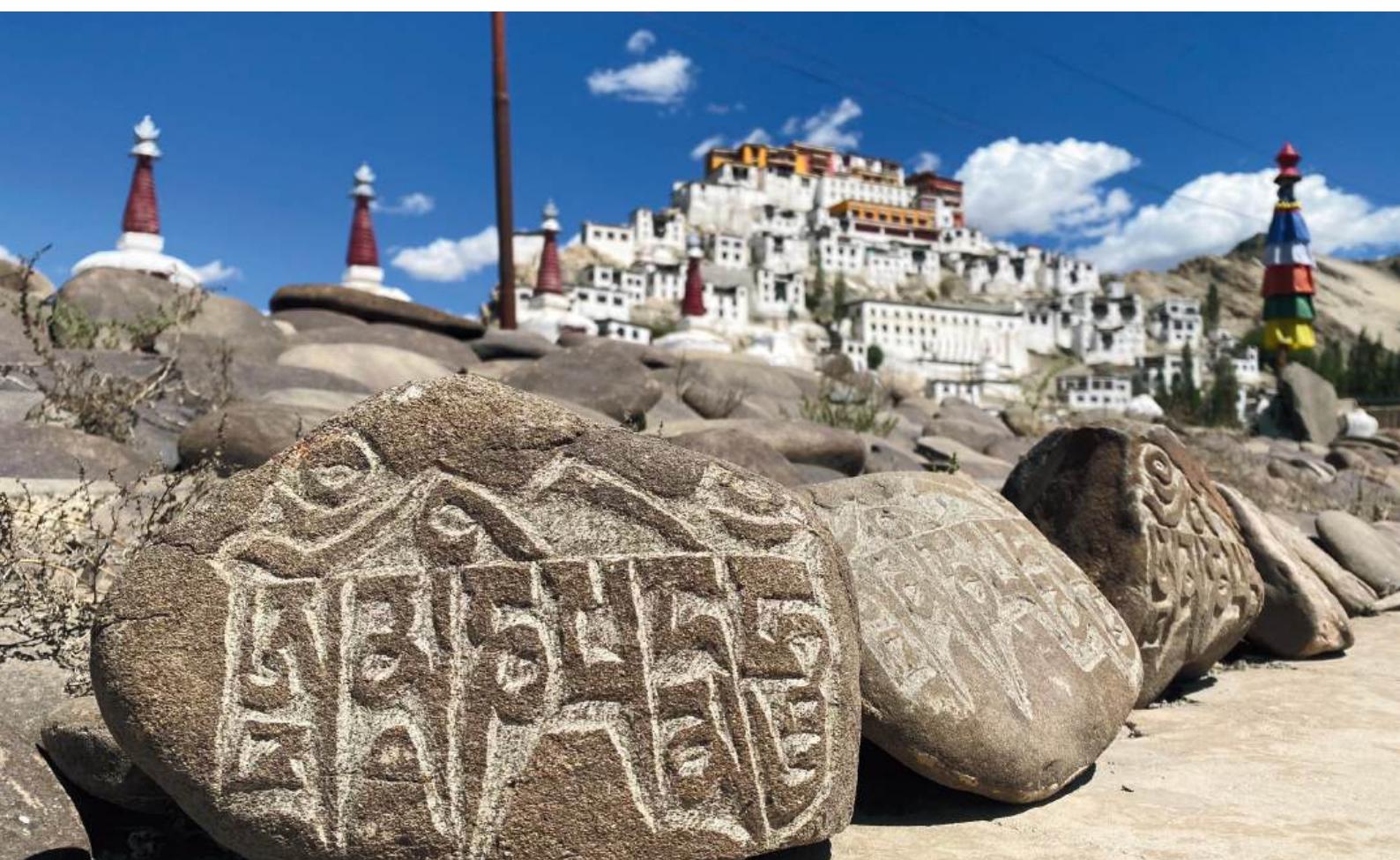




image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh I - Tarchit Village



image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - Tar Village

Throughout 14 days of the program, we invite you to travel slowly, to connect with Ladakhi people, to eat, sleep, and work side by side with locals. We invite you to experience the astonishing landscape of Nubra valley, Khardung La pass, hundreds-years-old monasteries carved into the mountainside and old town maze with finely crafted buildings made by rocks and wood. We invite you to stay with students at an alternative educational school for "10 grade failed" which has inspired the renowned movie "3 idiots". Then participating in educational workshops, studying Ladakhis way of life and practicing telling stories with your own voices and perspective

ABOUT US



VCIL Community: is a network and community of people who advocate paradigm shift, sustainable development in a disruptive world through alternative (non-traditional) education and entrepreneurship to build new (future) model of development.

There are 4 main areas that VCIL Community has dedicated to:

1. Alternative Education
2. Regenerative Development
3. Social Entrepreneurship & Alivelelihood
4. Network & Ecosystem Building



VCIL Travel School: is an international experiential/travel learning program which utilizes context-based learning in the cross-cultural environment. By combining education and traveling with community development for locals, cross-cultural collaboration, VCIL Travel School aims to renovate and redefine how education as well as tourism has happened.

VCIL Travel School changes the way education happens from the 4 walls classroom to the outside world where people get practical/hands-on experience by working with local organizations while creates positive impact for local community and immerse participants in different context to reflect upon themselves for inner change, diversify & challenge their viewpoint, broaden their knowledge/horizon, foster international collaboration.

Learn more about us at: <https://www.vciltravelschool.com>



CO-ORGANISER



Local Futures: works to renew ecological, social and spiritual well-being by helping to show the way towards a genuinely sustainable future — one of interconnected, localized economies. Our flagship Economics of Happiness program provides a range of educational and practical tools for communities and concerned citizens, and links a broad array of initiatives, alternative institutes and networks worldwide.

Website: <https://www.localfutures.org/>



Image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - Nubra Valley

OUR PARTNERS



The Ladakh Arts and Media Organization (LAMO): is a public charitable trust established to articulate an alternative vision for the arts and media in Ladakh. The organization set up the LAMO Centre in Leh, the main town of the region, to provide a space for the understanding and development of the arts. LAMO aims to revitalize living art forms, which are a rich resource of

potential livelihood and knowledge about the history and life of the people who created them. Its work is founded on the principle that culture is not merely rooted in tradition but is also open to change and innovation.

Websites: <https://lamo.org.in/index.html>



The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL): was founded in 1988 by a group of Ladakhi college students who felt that the education system needed great change. For many years, SECMOL worked on reforming the government school system. At the same time, SECMOL Campus grew into an eco-village where students, staff and volunteers live, work and learn together. It's not a conventional school, but a place to pursue practical, environmental, social and

traditional knowledge, values and skills. The Campus is solar powered and solar heated; students learn ancient Ladakhi songs, dance and history alongside modern academic knowledge; and the students mainly manage, run and maintain the campus. Website: <https://secmol.org/>



The Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL): is an alternative university that will engage youths from multiple Himalayan countries in research and development to tackle the issues faced by mountain people, especially in the domains of education, culture and the environment. Website: <https://www.hial.edu.in/>

RESOURCE PEOPLE



Helena Norberg-Hodge: Linguist, author and filmmaker, Helena Norberg-Hodge is the founder and director of the international non-profit organisation, Local Futures, a pioneer of the new economy movement, and the convenor of World Localization Day. Helena is the author of 'Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh' and 'Local is Our Future', and producer of 'The Economics of Happiness'. She is the recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'; the Goi Peace Prize for her pioneering work towards a new economy; and the Arthur Morgan Award.



Songam Wangchuk: is an Indian engineer, innovator and education reformist. He is the founding-director of the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, which was founded in 1988 by a group of students who had been in his own words, the 'victims' of an alien education system foisted on Ladakh. He is also known for designing the SECMOL campus that runs on solar energy and uses no fossil fuels for cooking, lighting or heating. He invented the Ice Stupa technique that creates artificial glaciers, used for storing winter water in form of conical shaped ice heap.

Rebecca Norman: She is a linguist who has recently published a dictionary of Ladakhi Colloquial language called the "RangSkat". She has been living in Ladakh for more than 26 years, and had been an integral part of development of SECMOL – the alternative educational institute in Ladakh. She is also a Gardener with a passion for wild herbs and plants.



LEARNING TOPICS



The context of Ladakh: Knowledge on Ladakhi local culture, nature, economics and social/environmental issues.

Tourism and Globalization in Ladakh: Examines the problems and consequences that the growth of mass tourism and globalization has had on Ladakhi society, community, and spirituality. Including: the issue of Ladakh's scarce natural resources; the waste problem; the fact that locals are gradually shifting away from their traditional source of livelihood—farming; climate change, and more.

Knowledge on traditional sustainable ways of living: Through living and working alongside the local residents in the village, participants will have the opportunity to explore and learn about traditional agriculture, indigenous architecture, native homes, sustainable lifestyles, self-sufficient economies, and the indigenous knowledge of the Ladakhi people.

Local Initiatives and Solutions: Facing the Challenges of Mass Tourism, Climate Change, and Unsustainable Economic Development: How have local residents endeavored to regenerate this crucial and beautiful land? Explore and learn about sustainable tourism development solutions and the localization movement.

EDUCATIONAL APPROACH



MINDFUL TRAVEL:

For many centuries, Ladakh evolved according to its own values. Then, in the 1970s, the region was thrown open to the global economy. This has brought many changes to Ladakh - including mass tourism, fossil fuels, junk food, plastic consumer goods, and unemployment. Aggravated by exposure to mass media, these changes have fostered the impression that life in the West is infinitely better than in Ladakh.

Tourists often unwittingly reinforce Ladakhis' insecurity about their lifestyle by expecting Western-style conveniences and products which undermine the local economy and damage the environment.

Greater knowledge about what is happening around the world is essential for Ladakhis to make informed decisions about their own future. Likewise, visitors can learn a great deal from traditional Ladakh and from the changes occurring in the name of development. Closer communication between visitors and Ladakhis can contribute to cultural self-respect.

If you observe the following guidelines, you will be helping to minimize the negative effects of tourism, and to maintain the respect that Ladakhis have for their culture and way of life.

Guidelines for Visitors

Make an effort to present a balanced picture by describing everyday life back home. Mention realities like inflationary prices, stress, overwork, depression, loneliness, pollution, homelessness as well as the growing movements to counter them.

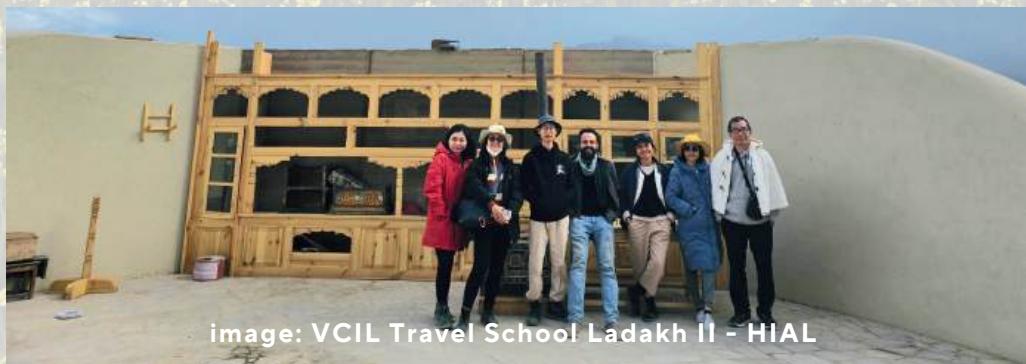


image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - HIAL



Supporting the Local Economy

- Choose local, organically produced foods as much as possible, both in restaurants and when shopping in the market.
- Try to avoid multinational corporate products such as Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, etc., which are destroying local economies and polluting environments the world over.
- Buy local-made crafts and support local shops, restaurants, guesthouses and trekking agencies so that the money you spend stays in the region.
- Inform yourself about current rates and prices so that you pay a fair price. By paying too much you contribute to inflation. By paying too little you deny merchants a fair return. Fellow travellers and tourist office personnel are good sources of information on current prices.

Protecting Ladakh's Environment

- Say 'NO' to plastic: Plastic is a huge waste problem, and there is no good solution to it: either it is dumped or burned, both of which are polluting and damaging to health. Refill your water bottle with boiled/filtered water, or filter your own with handheld filters or iodine drops. Avoid plastic-packaged foods or other products, and carry your own reusable bag for shopping.
- Save water: Water is becoming increasingly scarce and polluted because of tourism infrastructure. Use water very conservatively. Use Ladakhi compost toilets instead of flush toilets (many family-run guesthouses have one – ask for it). Don't throw anything toxic or non-biodegradable in the toilet. Use natural soaps/detergents and an eco-friendly laundry service.
- Save energy: Conserve electricity and use energy mindfully.



Image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - Monastery



Cultural Sensitivity

- All religious objects, including books, statues and photos, are kept off the floor.
- Don't point your feet at, or step over, people, religious objects, tables, food, etc.
- It is polite to give and receive with both hands, and to point with your whole hand, not just one finger. • It is impolite to taste from a utensil used for cooking.
- Always ask before entering Ladakhi houses, gardens, etc. and before taking photos.
- Do not respond to begging or encourage children to beg by giving money or other things to them.

Monasteries and Other Religious Sites

- Dress respectfully!
- Take off your shoes before entering shrines.
- Avoid touching the statues, books, thankas or any other religious objects.
- Do not disturb the monks during prayer. Remember that the monastery 'festivals' are not folkdances, but important rituals. If you take photographs, be discreet.
- Respect any signs asking you not to use flash photography in monasteries, since it may damage the frescoes.
- When walking through a monastery or when passing chortens and mani walls, always go around them in a clockwise direction, keeping them to your right.
- Never remove stones from mani walls.



Image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - Tar Village



Responsible Travelling and Trekking

- Carefully plan your trek or tour with your agency before setting off, to minimize environmental damage.
- Avoid single use plastic as much as possible; bring bulk foods in cloth or paper bags.
- Please do not collect any plants, flowers, or stones, and avoid burning wood which is a scarce resource.
- Respect and protect wildlife. Do not chase, disturb or feed wildlife. Avoid jeep safaris and offroading, which destroys habitat and stresses wildlife.
- Ask your guide, cook and agency to follow these guidelines

By adopting a mindful travel mindset, individuals can transform their journeys into meaningful and enriching experiences, fostering a deeper connection with the destinations they visit while promoting sustainability and cultural respect.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING:

Engaging in a program through a peer-to-peer learning approach fosters a collaborative and dynamic environment. Participants in the Ladakh learning program can share their knowledge, experiences, and insights, creating a rich tapestry of learning. This approach emphasizes the value of mutual exchange, allowing each participant to contribute and benefit from the diverse perspectives within the group.

FIELD RESEARCH

The Ladakh trip adopts a field research approach, providing participants with an opportunity to explore and study the region's culture, environment, and community dynamics firsthand. Immersed in the local context, participants can conduct on-site interviews, gather valuable data, and gain a deeper understanding of Ladakh. Field research enhances the learning experience by bridging theory with practical observation and analysis.





CONTEXT-BASED EDUCATION:

Participants will immerse themselves deeply in the Ladakh context. From the beauty of natural landscapes like the Nubra Valley, Khardung La pass, hundreds-year-old monasteries carved into the mountainside and old town mazes with finely crafted buildings made by rocks and wood., and the remote villages maintaining traditional Ladakhi lifestyles and culture, the program provides opportunities for participants to explore various facets such as culture, nature, socio-economic aspects, and the environment in Ladakh.

Throughout the 14 days of the program, to eat, sleep, and work side by side with locals, participants will perceive and experience the lifestyle, culture, and people of this region firsthand.

To comprehend the challenges Ladakh is facing and simultaneously learn the solutions it is researching and implementing for sustainable development, natural construction, renewable energy, clean food, and adaptation to climate change and harsh mountainous weather, participants will engage in meetings and discussions with scholars, researchers, educators, local residents, students, and local farmers.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND REFLECTION:

Experiential learning is a dynamic educational approach centered around active engagement and hands-on experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of concepts through direct involvement. Coupled with reflective practices, this methodology becomes a powerful tool for cultivating insights and connections. In the Ladakh learning program, this approach is manifested through various hands-on activities such as farming, cooking, and more.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING:

Embracing a participatory learning model, the Ladakh trip encourages active involvement and contribution from all participants. Rather than passively receiving information, individuals engage in hands-on activities, discussions, and collaborative projects. This approach empowers participants to take ownership of their learning experience, promoting a sense of shared responsibility and fostering a more profound connection with the Ladakhi culture and community.

TRAVEL ITINERARY (EXPECTED)



image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - HIAL

Day 1: Arrival & Acclimatization

Day 2: Explore and Learning about Leh (Old & New Leh) - Background Information

Morning: Old Ladakh

- Old Town/Heritage Walk by LAMO
- Leh Palace (optional)
- Central Asian Museum
- LAMO Center

Afternoon: Modern Ladakh

- Workshop to learn about Ladakh/Q&A
- Exploring development and situation of Ladakh by Video Voice/PhotoVoice - Dumpsites in Ladakh, waste and water pollution problems.

Day 3: Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh (The role of Buddhism in Ladakhi Life)

- Observe religion practices at homestay/hostel and market
- Learn about Tibetan Buddhism at the Monastery
- Visit several Gompas

Day 4-5-6-7: Local/Villagers' Life (Being a local)

- Mindful Travel with Local Futures at a Traditional village (traditions, customs, food, house, lifestyle, belief, etc.)
- Workshop on Sustainable Farming | Traditional Farming in Ladakh
- Workshop on Local Housing (Cultural and Architecture, Material Aspects)
- Workshop on Local Food

TRAVEL ITINERARY (EXPECTED)



image: VCIL Travel School Ladakh II - Nubra Valley

Day 7-8-9-10: Alternative Education and Sustainable Solutions at SECMOL

- Experience Alternative Education and Eco-living (Natural building, compost toilet, organic farming, food preservation, composting, etc.) at SECMOL
- Workshop on Alternative Education
- Workshop on Natural Building | Sustainable Building and Eco-living

Day 10: Alternative Education and Sustainable Solutions at HIAL

- Visit HIAL on the way back to Leh from SECMOL
- Workshop on alternative higher education or housing solutions/water solutions in Ladakh

Day 11-12-13: Tourism in Ladakh (Experiencing as a typical tourist)

- This Journey will include an experience of crossing the second highest motor able road called Khardung La, to reach Nubra valley (Hunder) where you will see the impact of mass tourism.
- Visit Sand dunes & watch camel safari
- Discuss about tourism in Ladakh, reflection
- Discuss about current situation, problems and possible solutions on tourism of Ladakh and connecting with our own places
- Webinar with Local Future founder - Helena Noberg Hodge
- Back to Leh

Day 14: Departure

LỊCH TRÌNH 9 NGÀY (DỰ KIẾN)

Day 1: Arrival & Acclimatization

Day 2: Explore and Learning about Leh (Old & New Leh) - Background Information

Morning: Old Ladakh

- Old Town/Heritage Walk by LAMO
- Leh Palace (optional)
- Central Asian Museum
- LAMO Center

Afternoon: Modern Ladakh

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- Workshop on Local Housing (Cultural and Architecture, Material Aspects)
- Workshop on Local Food

Day 8: Go back to Leh

- Go back to Leh and rest
- Program conclusion

Day 9: Departure

TESTIMONIAL



Here are some shares from participants in the VCIL TRAVEL SCHOOL - LADAKH II: MINDFUL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABLE LIVING journey about their experiences in Ladakh. Scan to read their testimonials.



Phương Anh's sharing



Mỹ Anh's sharing



Búi Búi's sharing



Huỳnh Thu's sharing

PROGRAM FEE



01 PART 1: CONNECTING TO THE LAND AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

9 days 8 nights:

- From 25th Apr - 03rd May, 2025
- Or from 10th - 18th August, 2025

For Non-membership registration: **690\$**

For membership registration: **610\$**



02 FULL PROGRAM: MINDFUL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABLE LIVING

14 days 13 nights:

- From 25th Apr - 08th May, 2025
- Or from 10th - 23rd August, 2025

For Non-membership registration: **1000\$**

For membership registration: **840\$**

* The fee above include:

- Accommodation and internal transportation within Ladakh region
- Three meals per day
- Learning material & logistical preparation
- Travel insurance
- Designing program, facilitation and workshops
- Permission to enter certain location at Ladakh

*The fee above EXCLUDE:

- Rounded flights between your places to Ladakh
- Indian visa fee



Scan the QR code to register for
VCIL Community Membership

FINANCIAL AID

In addition to ensuring that VCIL Community's educational programs are valuable, practical, and highly applicable, contributing to personal transformation and societal changes, VCIL Community also strives to make the programs as cost-effective as possible. The aim is to ensure that everyone can participate, minimizing financial barriers to community learning. If the program fees are a concern, consider the following ways to receive maximum financial support from VCIL Community (participants can avail multiple forms of financial support simultaneously - financial support is unlimited).



Installment Support for 3-6-9 Months:

- VCIL Community offers flexible installment plans for 3 to 9 months, ensuring accessible learning for all.
- Don't let course fees be a barrier—plan your finances and discuss options with VCIL Community.
- Ideal for those seeking alternatives to scholarships, as installment support is available to all participants.



Join VCIL Community Membership

Members are prioritized for maximum support in all programs. For the 14-day program, members will receive a 15% discount on the participation fee. For the 9-day program, members can join for only 15,860,000 VND (equivalent to a 12% discount)



Contact VCIL Community

- Participants can email vcil.group@gmail.com for personalized discussions and support tailored to their specific situations and needs.



Find more information and register as a member by scanning the QR code above.

ĐĂNG KÝ CÁC CHƯƠNG TRÌNH NĂM 2025

At VCIL Travel School, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to experience the magic of Ladakh. That's why we've worked hard to find solutions, breaking down barriers related to time and cost, so that the program can be accessible to a diverse range of people with different schedules and budgets.

Join us for a 9-day (or 14-day) adventure with Travel School and make your Ladakh dream come true today.

04 APR 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

April Program (14 days):
From April 25, 2025 to **May 8**, 2025.

VCIL Travel School in Ladakh will organize two programs in 2025, with the following planned durations. Each program will also offer an option to participate in part of the program, lasting 9 days, suitable for individuals who prefer a shorter experience.

05 MAY 2025

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

April Program (9 days):
From April 25, 2025 to **May 3**, 2025.

08 AUG 2025

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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

August Program:
14 days: From August 10 to **August 23**, 2025
9 days: From August 10 to **August 18**, 2025



Register by scanning the QR code.

FEEDBACK



Shared by Ms. Mỹ Anh - a participant in the program
VCIL TRAVEL SCHOOL - LADAKH III: MINDFUL TRAVEL &
SUSTAINABLE LIVING



The trip to visit SECMOL School reminded me of the stories of Zezé from the book My Sweet Orange Tree (In Portuguese: *Meu Pé de Laranja Lima*). Despite being in a difficult environment, the hearts of good people are not clouded.

There, there are dreams, the dreams come from young people, aged 19-20, who failed the 10th-grade exam not just once, but five times. They still hold on to the hope of changing Ladakh. Some are working on education projects, building schools for less fortunate students, while others focus on environmental projects.

There, the students are doing what they're good at or at least finding direction for their future careers. Some will learn horseback riding, others will learn how to milk cows, use charts to calculate the milk production needed for the next year, or grow crops.

There, the school is the only one I visited that can provide its own fruits and vegetables, using natural resources very efficiently, such as building houses with two layers to preserve heat. When the outside temperature is -1°C, the inside temperature stays at 16-17°C. There, there's enthusiasm. No matter which student I asked about a particular issue, they always tried to find the answer with me based on their knowledge.

There, there is also Sonam Wangchuk, the person who inspired the movie Three Idiots. It felt like a blessing to hear him speak about the challenges he's faced. He said, 'Whenever you feel things are tough, it's a sign that you're on the right path in your life.'

FEEDBACK



Shared by Huynh Thu - a participant in the program
VCIL TRAVEL SCHOOL - LADAKH III: MINDFUL TRAVEL &
SUSTAINABLE LIVING



I may not be the one who learned the most or stayed the longest, but I am definitely the smallest.

When I was a student, my biggest fear was the lecturer. Not fear in the conventional sense, but the fear of the truth, the gravity, and the wisdom of the other person. I was eager to learn, to travel, to search for value, and to create value.

What I like most is education, and what I fear most is education. I fear that without care, it could turn into a double-edged sword.

This time, my companions came from various backgrounds, but most were in the education field – teachers, lecturers from schools and large universities. These were people who were already excellent but still inspired me to continue learning. From those I once “feared,” they became brothers and sisters, sharing food and clothes.

There were businessmen discussing the nuances of life, an HR from Lazada wearing the same Himalayan trekking outfit, a teacher from UEL, a Fulbright scholar sharing grilled meat, a UEF teacher buying me chocolate, a sister from Bitis eating, sleeping, and sharing moments with me, along with my mother and a “new” younger brother. There was a brave sister who shared personal stories that seemed like deep wounds from the past. There was a teacher with whom I discussed young love. There was a teacher from Vinschool who brought out many tears in me with a heartfelt letter. There was a friend who made this trip more enjoyable and interesting for me. All of this made me realize the many sides and aspects of one, or several, issues.

Throughout the journey, I was the smallest, and perhaps also the one who was cared for and helped the most. I never thought I would be part of a team, except for work. My seriousness, values, independence, and pragmatism made me always focus on results, measurable values, and attainable goals. Everything became fast, simple, efficient, and optimized. There was never room for love, emotions, or spiritual well-being.

Before the trip, I tried to find ways to optimize the value I could achieve. But now, that value for me is no longer something that can be measured by numbers.



VIDEO RECAP



VCIL Travel School Ladakh 2022



VCIL Travel School Ladakh 2023

Contact us



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Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam





CONTEXT-BASED & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Scan to register

