

Manali To Leh Highway Guide

Out of the 2 main routes to reach Leh via road, Manali to Leh is always the preferred one mainly because of its challenging nature and the ever changing landscape that is mesmerizing and spectacular. Deep verdant valleys, expanses of snow-capped mountain ranges, rugged barren terrain - windswept and desolate at places, high mountain passes, nomad shepherds, small quaint villages, rough roads, hairpin bends, you will see it all.

But apart from the beauty of this region, what attracts most people on this route are miles and miles of isolation. It becomes hard to believe that this region is a part of India, the 2nd most populous country in the world because you won't come across to a single living soul for hours and miles. And the ones you would will either the nomad shepherds or adventure and photography enthusiasts like yourself.

Manali to Leh is a two lane highway [single lane at some stretches], 5,328 m at its highest elevation point and 490 kms in length. It is a mix of good and bad patches and will take you across 5 high altitude passes and numerous small streams of ice-cold water with no bridge to cross.

The Lahaul district of state of Himachal Pradesh ends at Sarchu, 230 kms from Manali. Zaskar region of Jammu and Kashmir starts at Sarchu and Leh is another 260 kms from here.

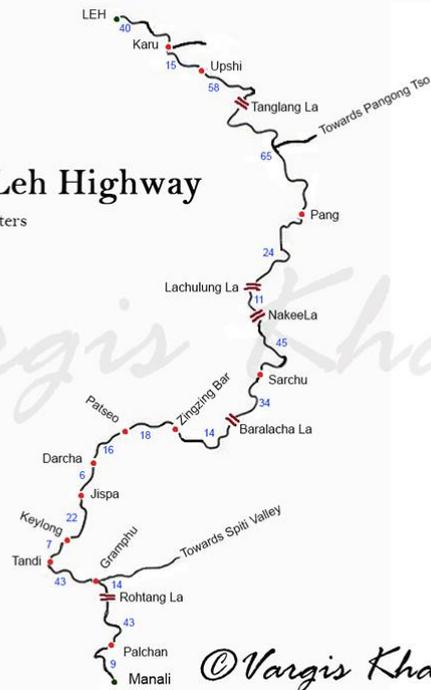
Route of this journey is as below.

- Manali – Marhi - Rohtang Pass [52 Kms]
- Rohtang Pass - Gramphu - Kokhsar [19 Kms]
- Kokhsar- Sissu - Tandi [38 Kms]
- Tandi - Keylong [9 Kms]
- Keylong - Jispa [22 Kms]
- Jispa - Darcha [6 Kms]
- Darcha – Sumdo - Patsio - Zingzingbar - Baralacha La - Bharatpur - Sarchu [84 Kms]
- Sarchu - Gata Loops - Nakeela La - Lachulung La - Pang [80 Kms]
- Pang - More Plains - Tanglang La - Gya - Upshi [125 Kms]
- Upshi - Karu - Leh [55 Kms]

Map and detailed information is provided below.

Manali to Leh Highway

All distances in kilometers



1. Manali - Marhi - Rohtang Pass :

Your first day of the journey from Manali will have you cross the mighty Rohtang Pass. Effective 2012, a pass is required to cross Rohtang La which can be obtained from city's DM office. This office opens at 10 am and if you are there on time, you can have the pass in your hand within an hour and be on your way towards Rohtang. Or you can chose to take the pass, spend the day in Manali and start for Rohtang the next day.

It is advised to leave from Manali in early hours as there is a huge traffic on this road through out the day. Taxi Drivers, tourists wanting to visit Rohtang and a huge amount of trucks will start on the ascent with the break of dawn.

It is also interesting to know that the word Rohtang actually means a "pile of corpses" and the name derived from a lot of people dying in bad weather, trying to cross the pass in old times.

But do not let that scare you. The 52 kms ascent to Rohtang is a feast for eyes because of the beautiful vistas all around you. If you started early from Manali, you can either have breakfast at Marhi, 19 kms from Manali, or at Rohtang Pass itself . There are a lot of dhabas open at Rohtang Top through out the day so you can take a quick stop here to eat and to click photographs.

Road to Rohtang is a mix of super smooth and super rough patches. Slight rain in this terrain can create havoc on this road.

2. Rohtang - Gramphu - Kokhsar:

Kokhsar is a small village, 19kms downhill from Rohtang. The only significance this village will have in this journey is that foreign nationals need to get themselves registered here, before continuing towards Leh. This village also has an accommodation option available in

form of a guest house in case you want to spend the night here. It is also the first village in Lahaul Valley and road bifurcates towards Spiti at Gramphoo, little before Kokhsar.

3. Kokhsar - Sissu - Tandi :

The last gas station on this route is at Tandi. After this, there is no other petrol pump for another 380 kms, until Leh. While you can still get fuel at local dhabas on this route at a higher than regular price, it is strongly advised to tank up at Tandi and carry extra fuel (in case your motorcycle's petrol tank isn't large enough to carry enough fuel to complete the journey).

A road towards Udaipur bifurcates at Tandi.

4. Tandi - Keylong:

Keylong is the district headquarters of Lahaul and Spiti and is the last town on this route where a mechanic is available. It is a good idea to get a final check done on your motorcycle here. This is also the last place where you will see network signals in your cellphone.

Keylong has a few decent hotels and in case you have started late from Manali, you can opt to break the first day of your journey here. Kardhang Monastery is located in Keylong, across the Bhaga River.

5. Keylong - Jispa:

Jispa is a small village on this route. It has a hotel and tenting accommodations are also available here. In case it is still your first day of the journey, it is strongly recommended to halt here for the night as there won't be any accommodation available after Jispa, until Sarchu.

6. Jispa - Darcha :

Roads here are in good condition. You will need to get yourself registered at the check post here.

7. Darcha - Sumdo - Patsio - Zingzingbar - Baralcha La - Bharatpur - Sarchu :

Roads here are somewhat better than so far on this route. You will come across to beautiful Deepak taal after Darcha, don't forget to take a quick break at the Dhaba near the lake and click photographs. Right after Deepak Taal, the ascent towards Baralcha La starts.

Baralcha La is where you will encounter snow again, after Rohtang La. This pass is covered with snow through out the year.

There is also an interesting story around this pass. Folklore states that there were two lovers, Chandra being the daughter of the Moon and Bhaga the son of the Sun god. To perform their eternal marriage, they decided to climb to the Baralcha-la and from there they ran in opposite directions. Chandra being active and smart easily, found her way and reached Tandi after covering the distance of 115 km. Soon Bhaga was found coming with great struggle through the narrow gorges to Tandi, where consequently both met and the celestial marriage was performed.

Sarchu is a military base and a major halt point on this route. It has tented accommodations available and is a good spot to spend the night.

Chances are that you will experience Acute Mountain Sickness for the first time in this region. Road conditions will keep changing from bad to good to bad again in this area.

8. Sarchu - Gata Loops - Nakeela - Lachulung La - Pang :

Right after Sarchu, the ascent of Gata Loops start. Gata Loops is a series of 21 hairpin bends that takes you to the top of Nakeela La, your 3rd high mountain pass on this route. Interestingly enough, these loops are said to be haunted. No one stops at Gata Loops unnecessarily and there is a story behind it.

Somewhere on this road you will notice a dump of mineral water bottles, in the middle of nowhere with a small temple nearby, a flag fluttering on top of it. A dump of plastic waste like that can be an eyesore in such a beautiful landscape but that is not the strange part. Strange part is that all these bottles are full of water, some of them even sealed pack.

It is said that years ago, a truck broke down on one of these loops. The driver walked towards a nearby village to seek a mechanic while the cleaner stayed back with the truck as it was loaded with the cargo. The driver, after walking for miles and miles finally reached a village but alas, there was no mechanic available there. While the driver was still at the village, it started to snow heavily and the weather closed in so he had no option but to stay at the village, well aware that the cleaner was stranded on the road, with the truck. But there was nothing he could do. It was several days before the weather cleared and help came by. They all immediately went back to the spot where the truck broke down only to find the cleaner dead, due to thirst and exposure to cold weather. Rather than carrying a dead and decomposing body back home, the poor guy was buried right where he died.

So the legend says that after this incident, people started meeting a beggar on the loops who begged them for the water. People who refused suffered serious mountain sickness (some even died of it, it is said) and the ones who offered water to the beggar out of pity saw the bottles they offered drop right through the man's hands, while he still kept begging them for water. Terror struck the region and only subsided when the locals set up a memorial at the site and made offerings of water to placate the ghost.

So is the legend of the ghost of gata loops where people still stop and make offerings of water.

But don't worry, it is not the ghost of the dead trucker who will make this ascent difficult. It will be the live ones in a long line of slow moving trucks and a cloud of thick smoke and dust that will test you to the bone while you climb up to Nakeela Top.

Right after Nakeela, after descending down for a few kilometers, you will again start climbing up the 4th high mountain pass of this route, Lachulung La, one of the easier passes.

Descent from Lachulung La will take you to Pang, another tented accommodation where you can spend the night. If you have not faced Acute Mountain sickness on this route so far, Pang is the place where you will definitely suffer from it.

9. Pang - Moore Plains - Tanglang La - Gya - Upshi :

4 kms from Pang, you will be greeted with the spectacular sight of Moore Plains, A plateau sitting in the lap of Himalayas. It is a flat piece of land for about 30-35 kilometers inviting you to accelerate but do not make that mistake. The road is bumpy and can test your vehicle's suspensions and upset your stomach.

After the more plains, the tough climb towards Tanglang La, the fifth and last high mountain pass on this route, starts. Though Tanglang La claims to be the world's second highest motor-able pass, it is often said to be incorrect as there are several higher motor-able passes in Tibet.

But it is the severely deteriorated roads on this ascent and descent that makes crossing this pass difficult, not the height.

Apart from the roads, second factor that will test your nerves at Tanglang La is Acute Mountain Sickness. Be ready to feel like you have just been hit by a train while you are crossing this pass. You will feel feverish and will have severe headache but don't worry, things will get better once you start descending down.

Road gets much better as you get closer to Upshi. As a matter of fact, you will find it even better than most city roads, thanks to BRO.

10. Upshi - Karu - Leh :

By now AMS will subside and you will start feeling much better. Take a quick tea break at Upshi and off you are on your way to Leh, which is hardly an hour's drive from here.

Accommodations And Other Facilities :

- Only Kokhsar, Keylong, Jispa and Upshi on this route have hotels and guest houses available. Camping sites are also available here.
- Darcha, Zinging Bar, Bharatpur, Sarchu, Pang and Upshi all have tented accommodations.
- The last petrol pump is located in Tandi post which there is no Gas Station for another 380 Kms till Leh.
- Keylong is the last town that has a Mechanic.
- Cell phones may work till Keylong however there are high chances that your phone will get out of reach as soon as you reach Rohtang top.