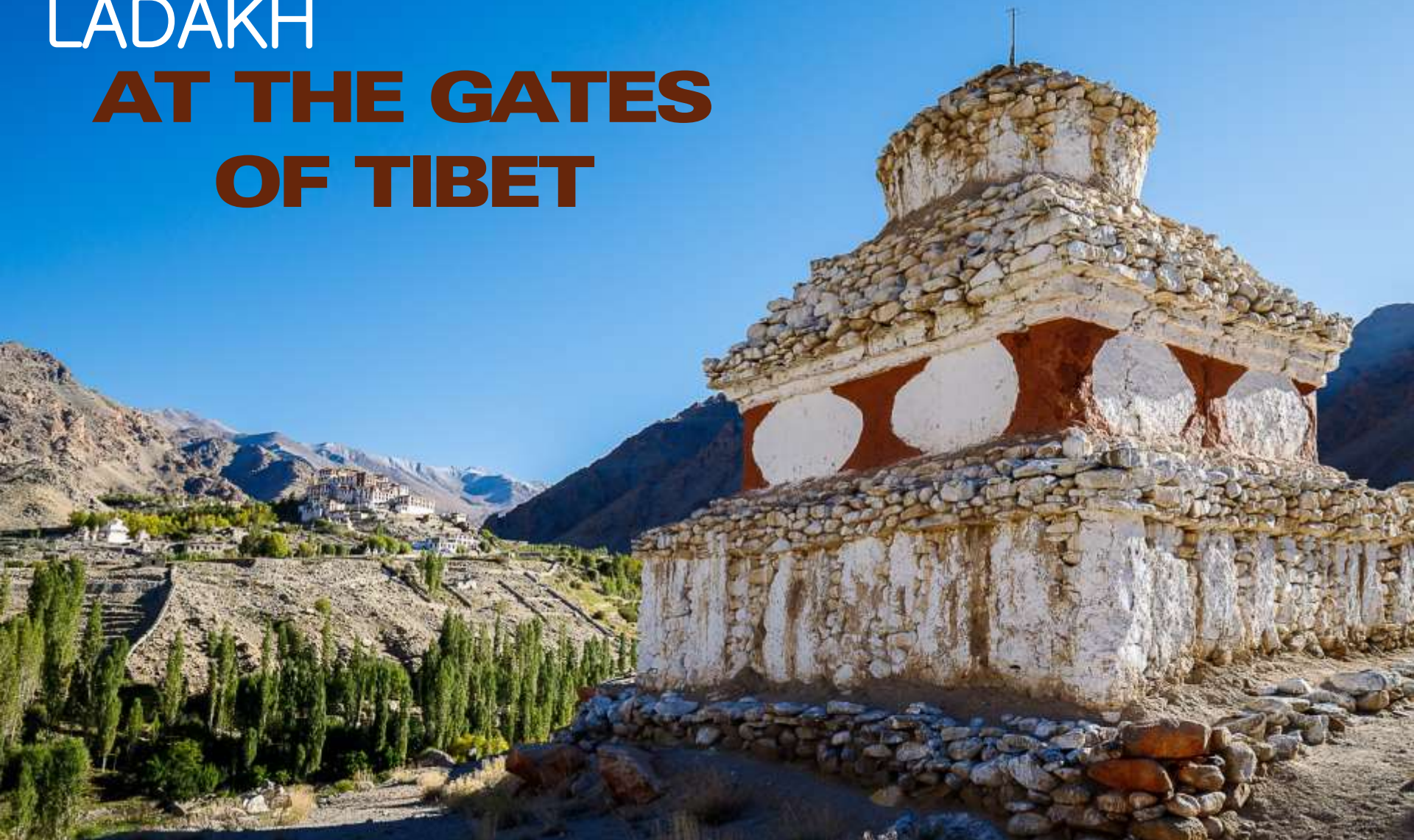


LADAKH **AT THE GATES OF TIBET**



Dominated by snow-capped peaks of more than 7000 m, Ladakh is an altitude desert suspended at more than 3500 m, surrounded by high passes. Confined to the far north of India, to the disputed borders of Pakistan and China.

The Indus, one of the three major rivers of the Himalayas, crosses the fertile plain of Leh, the regional capital. In the adjacent valleys, oases shelter the villages. In spring, the green spots of the barley fields contrast in a mineral and arid universe. The stone here reigns supreme, and it is with this material, whitewashed, that the "Gompas" and the "Chörtens" were raised. On the side of cliffs or perched on top of hills, Ladakh is the Himalayan region with the highest concentration of Buddhist monasteries.

In a predominantly peasant population, wisdom and intense religious fervor are revealed daily through the practice of rituals and the use of religious objects, including the emblematic "prayer wheel". In the East, at the threshold of Tibet, at 4,500 m above sea level, around the Tso-Kar and Tsomoriri lakes, the highlands of Chang-Tang are the territory of nomads Chang-Pa, breeder of the goat Pashmina, renowned for the quality of his wool.

This region, isolated in winter by snow-covered passes, is full of promise of adventure. At the heart of these strikingly bright and luminous mountains, a strong sense of fullness fills the traveler with the immensity and beauty of the landscape.

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The Indus Valley and Leh (3,500 m), the regional capital, seen from the monastery of Namgyal Tsemo Gumpa.



Tsemo Gompa (Peak Monastery) rises to the top of the hill overlooking the town of Leh. Around this building float a multitude of prayer flags (tib.tarchok). On these rectangles of colored tulle are printed sacred formulas (mantras or sutras) and symbols. So trusting the wind to spread a message of peace and harmony.



In Leh, two Buddhist monks in saffron robes pray in front of Santi Stupa to receive alms.



Moonland (3,624 m) or Moon Valley, name given to this great circus of clay near Lamayuru.



Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha erected above the Hemis gompa.



The gompa of Chemrey, in its mineral universe crushed by the chain of Zaskar in the background.



The Lamayuru gompa (3510m) of the Kagyupa order and its two great chörten.



The 23-meter high golden statue of Buddha Maitreya (Buddha of the Future) of Likir Monastery.



Young novices (dapas) of the Gelugpa order, pray in the schoolyard of the Likir monastery. It is usually at the end of twelve years that the novice is promoted to the rank of gelong, that is to say, ordered.



An old lama comes out of the Dukhang (worship hall) in Hemis' courtyard after attending the daily liturgical rite (chödpa) at sunrise.



The verdant valley of the Indus and the gompa of Thiksey east of Leh.



Lamayuru built in the late 11th century around the sacred cave in which Naropa stayed, in an exceptional site 126 km west of Leh.



In Leh (3,500 m), an elderly woman turns a large prayer wheel at the Buddhist temple of Gumpa Soma (Chokhang) by chanting her rosary.



The immense prayer wheel of the Lamayuru gompa (3510 m) of the Kagyupa order.



The prayer wheels are ubiquitous in Ladakh, used by the faithful or arranged on the way of circumambulation around the monasteries.





Tzering, from the Skurbuchan and Sham region wearing a perak covered with turquoises.



During the annual Ladakh Festival, men from a cultural troupe in the Gya-Meru region donned their traditional clothes.



A man from a cultural troupe in the Gya-Meru region wearing the snam-chok singge, a headdress immersing the head of a lion.



A woman from a cultural troupe in the Nimoo region



After the morning religious ceremony, a monk performed a circumambulation around the Hemis gompa, turning his prayer wheel and reciting the mantra om mani padme hum.



Every morning a faithful person performs several times a circumambulation around the Buddhist temple from Gompa Soma (Chokhang) to Leh, turning his prayer wheel and reciting the mantra om mani padme hum.



The oil lamps room of Hemis Monastery. Pilgrims pour oil into the lamps so that they continue to burn and symbolically chase away the darkness of ignorance.



In Thiksey, lamas of the Gelugpa Order make a mandala made of colored sand powder.



A monk of the order Gelugpa prostrates himself in the Gonkhang of Thikse.



The colorful interior of Dukang Somar of Matho's gumpa and the statue of Buddha Sakyamuni.



Alignment of chörtens near the Phyang gumpa. A religious symbol, this building illustrates the stages of meditation, represented by five levels attached to the five elements. From the bottom to the top: the earth, the water, the fire, the air, the ether or the essence of the spirit. The chörten punctuates the paths and announces the proximity of a monastery or a hamlet.



On the Chang-Thang (Changtang) plateau, prayer flags flutter above the village of Karzok (4,572 m) and Tsomoriri Lake.



Lake Tsomoriri (4,530 m) on the Chang-Thing Plateau (Changtang), a multitude of prayer flags (tib.tarchok) float in the winds. On these rectangles of colored tulle are printed sacred formulas (mantras or sutras) and symbols. So trusting the wind to spread a message of peace and harmony.



Alignment of chörtens above the village of Karzok (4,572 m) and Lake Tsomoriri in the background.



Sur la rive sud du lac Tsomoriri, de nombreux mur *mani* jalonnent le chemin, où s'amoncellent de magnifiques pierres gravées de sûtras (prières bouddhistes).



Changthang Plateau (Changtang), west bank of Tsomoriri Lake (4,530 m).



In the Markha Valley, threshing barley with horses and yaks at the village of Umlung.



The chörtens of the Tetsha Hermitage on the trekking route from Chilling to Chogdo in the Markha Valley.



Markha Valley, a shower of snow on the mountains above the plain of Nimaling (4,840 m).



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