



LADAKH

# GOMPA FORTRESS OF FAITH

The massive appearance surprises the visitor when he sees for the first time a gompa (monastery). It is true that the building looks much more like a medieval fortress, than a monastery, as we imagine in the Western world. And as also illustrates, the name dzong which means fortress in Tibetan, attributed to many gompa of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan.

Bastion of the Buddhist tradition, the gompas are erected in grandiose landscapes with gigantic dimensions. Often built in a secluded place, at the top of a high hill where the steep cliff flanks. The imposing enclosure overlooking the agricultural plains and villages is organized around one or more rooms of worship.

Located in the heart of the mountains between 3 500 m and 7 500 m altitude, Ladakh is the Himalayan region with the highest concentration of gompa. A territory at the crossroads of ancient caravans from Central Asia and Tibet, in the extreme north of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir.

The gompa is at the same time a center of study and contemplation. By its size and its dominant position, it symbolizes the function of religious building and ensures the essential of the oral and written transmission. In the same way that there are several doctrines within Tibetan Buddhism, each monastery is related to one of the four major religious orders: Kagyupa, Sakyapa, Gelugpa and Nyingmapa, more commonly known as Red Hats and that of the Yellow Hats.

Home to spiritual life and artistic creation, the gompa plays a major social and economic role. Unlike traditional ascetic mores in the West, the monastic community is not isolated, frequent exchanges of service with the secular population strengthen the ties between the two communities.





The Namgyal Tsemo gompa, at an altitude of 3,639 m, overlooks Leh, the regional capital of Ladakh.





The Phyang gompa of the Kagyupa order.





Hemis, gompa of the order Drugpa-Kagyupa.





The gompa of Chemrey.





The Likir gompa of the Gelugpa order.





The gompa of Chemrey, on the flanks of the hill of small white construction shelter the cells of the monks.





The sun reveals the shadows on Likir and makes shine the golden statue, 23 meters high, of Buddha Maitreya (Buddha of the future).





Phyang



Hemis





Thiksey 12km from Leh. Built on a hill, it was erected in the 15th century and houses a community of about eighty monks of the order Gelugpa.





The gigantic statue of Buddha Maitreya (Buddha of the future) gives his benevolence to the monastery of Likir.





Un très jeune novice (*dapas*) de l'ordre Kagyupa devant les chörtens du gompas de Lamayuru.





Young novices (dapas) of the Gelugpa order study in the school yard of the 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.





Two elderly women from the neighboring village leave the Dukhang (the hall of worship) in the courtyard of the Hemis gompa after attending the daily liturgical rite (chödpa) at sunrise.





After attending the morning religious ceremony, two devotees perform a circumambulation around the Hemis gompa, turning their prayer wheel and reciting the om mani padme hum mantra, supposed to increase their merit.









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.





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





The prayer flags fluttering in the wind of the Matho Monastery and the colorful tower housing the grand staircase of the new Matho Museum.





Chemrey in his mineral universe crushed by the chain of Zaskar in the background.





The silhouette of the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha erected above the monastery of Hemis.





A statue of the Shakyamuni Buddha erected above the Hemis gompa dominates the Indus Plain.





The inner courtyard of Thiksey gomba of Gelugpa order. In the center, is the traditional "banner-of-the-victory" (Tib Gyaltzen).





On the rooftop terrace of Likir Monastery stands the "Trident of Victory", a symbol of spiritual realization.





A believer prays in the courtyard of Likir Monastery, in front of the Dukang entrance. In the center floats the "banner-of-victory" (Tib gyaltsen), Buddhist symbol of enlightenment and spiritual realization.





The statue of Maitreya Buddha inside the Dukang of the Matho Gumpa.



The statue of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the Kawa Kachuapa Lhakang (Temple of the Ten Columns) of the Hemis Monastery.





The immense prayer wheel of the Lamayuru gompa. On the way of circumambulation, are arranged many engraved stones of the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum.







A monk from the Kagyupa order of Lamayuru Monastery, in front of the 13th century Sengge Lhakhang temple entrance.





Monk of the Order Gelugpa in the entrance of the Main Assembly Hall of Thiksey. The monastery overlooks the fertile plains of the Indus.





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





The colorful interior of the Dukang Somar gumpa Matho with the statue of Buddha Sakyamuni in the background.





The Likir Dukhang has six rows of seats for llamas and a throne for the main Lama. In front of each coffee table (choktsé) is a blanket in which the monks cover themselves in order to protect themselves from the cold.





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





Recent paintings depicting a mandala on the ceiling of the new Dukhang in Phyang.





A mural depicting Akhsobhya or Meditation Buddha surrounded by the Thousand Buddhas of Hemis Dukhang.





At the Monastery of Matho, the Lamdre Lhakang temple dedicated to Saskya Pandita is home to very old soot blackened thangka. Meditation support, these paintings on fabrics generally represent a Buddhist deity.





In Phyang, a monk of the Kagyupa order contemplates the Buddha statue in the recent Dukhang. The richly decorated paintings completely cover the surface of the walls and illustrate the path and purpose of Buddhism.





A 12-meter statue of Maitreya Buddha (Buddha of the Future) rises on two floors inside the Thiksey Chamkhang.





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.





Tsemo Gumpa, shrouded in the setting sun of a wonderful golden light.





The grandiose site of Lamayuru Monastery.





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