

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 outside the region is infinitely better than in Ladakh, and that cities are better than the rural.

Tourists often unwittingly undermine the local economy and damage the environment by expecting 'modern'-style conveniences and products.

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.

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 stress, overwork, depression and loneliness, pollution, homelessness as well as the growing movements to counter them.

Supporting the Local Economy

- Choose, local, organically produced foods as much as possible, both in restaurants and when shopping in the market.
- Avoid multinational corporate products such as Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi/Lays, 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.



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.



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 off-roading, which destroys habitat and stresses wildlife.
- Ask your guide, cook and agency to follow these guidelines.



Monasteries and Other Religious Sites

- Dress respectfully!
- Take off your shoes before entering shrines.
- Refrain from smoking, drinking alcohol, spitting, and noise-making.

- 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.

About Local Futures

This pamphlet was produced by Local Futures, an international non-profit organisation promoting locally-based alternatives to the global consumer culture. Local Futures has been active in Ladakh for more than 3 decades, and its founder, Helena Norberg-Hodge, is the author of *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*.

For more information, please visit our website, www.localfutures.org. We can also be reached by email at info@localfutures.org.

Join Local Futures for screenings of *Ancient Futures: Learning From Ladakh*, *The Economics of Happiness*, and other films in Leh. For current timings, email:

lfladakh@localfutures.org

MINDFUL TRAVEL IN LADAKH

Guidelines for Visitors to Ladakh



LOCAL
FUTURES

www.localfutures.org