

# Culture & Lifestyle

VOLUME 1 : SPITI VALLEY



THE  
ASSAM  
VALLEY  
SCHOOL





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THE  
ASSAM  
VALLEY  
SCHOOL

Development Programme  
100 mtr span Chicham bridge  
Sambha, Jammu, Wullah  
255.85 Lacs  
Suspension stay  
steel truss bridge  
120 mtr  
425 mtr  
2003  
2017  
150 mtr  
405.50 Lacs (under EAP)  
7852 & Others - 2793 Lacs







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# Foreword

Rain, coffee, and the 'Culture & Lifestyle' magazine make an absolute delightful company for the reader.

Evocative landscape, culture, and the demographic beauty of our nation, captured in various hues, make one yearn to be a part of the stoic serenity. Each page conveys a certain degree of placidity, reaffirming our faith in mother nature and the almighty.

I congratulate the team for their effort, strengthening my faith that each page will leave us mesmerized by the vivid illustrations and ingenuousness.

**Dr. Amit Jugran**

*Headmaster,*

*The Assam Valley School*

*October 21, 2022*







# Introduction

On the 18th of September 2022, twenty-five students and two teachers from The Assam Valley School took off to Spiti Valley on an eight-day trip.

The trip was an unforgettable experience, so we decided to store these memories as a visual go-through of the place. Here we share our impressions and experiences and learning about one of the varied regional cultures and lifestyles in India, the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. In the following few chapters, we will take you through the best locations in Spiti, all a must-visit.





# Shimla to Chitkul



Sangla Valley





**Spiti** (pronounced as Piti in the Bhoti language) is a high-altitude region of the Himalayas located in the northeastern part of the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The name "Spiti" means "The middle land", i.e. the land between Tibet and India. Spiti incorporates mainly the valley of the Spiti river and the valleys of several rivers that feed into the Spiti river. Some of the significant side valleys in Spiti are the Pin valley and the Lingti valley. Spiti is bordered on the east by Tibet, on the north by Ladakh, on the west and southwest by Lahaul, on the south by Kullu, and on the southeast by Kinnaur. The valley and its surrounding regions are among the least populated areas of India. Spiti has a cold desert environment. The Bhoti-speaking local population follows Tibetan Buddhism.





Chitkul in Sangla Valley is in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. It is supposed to be one of the most beautiful valleys in the country. In Tibetan, the term Sangala means "pass of light", which refers to the valley receiving sunlight during the day. It is the last inhabited village before the Indo-China border. The Baspa River flows through the Baspa Valley.











# Chitkul to Kalpa







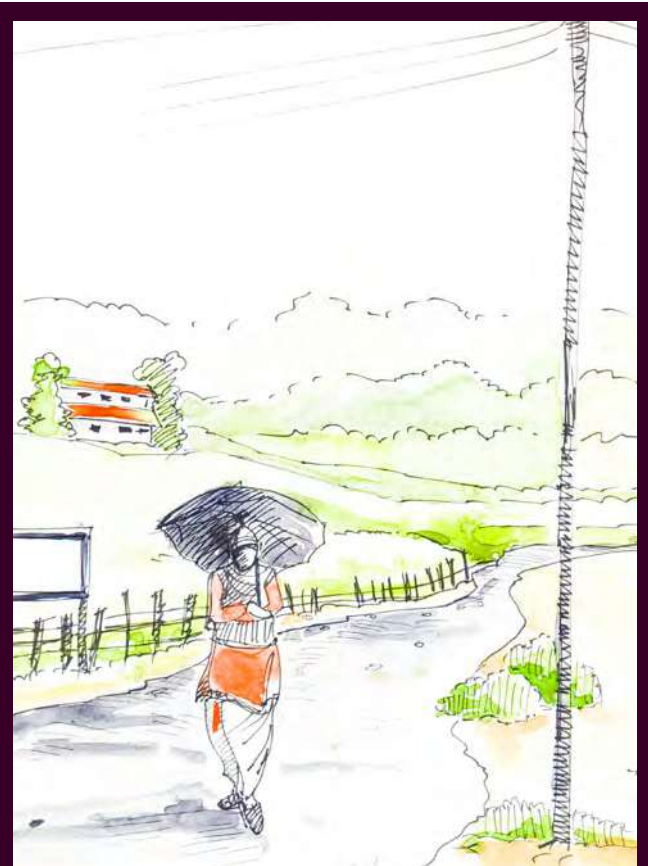
Carved out of the rocks, you can find the Kinnaur road in the southwestern part of Himachal Pradesh, which joins Chitkul to Kalpa. The road is extremely narrow and has sharp blind turns, so it has been given the title of one of the most dangerous roads in the world.

Colourful prayer flags are seen flying in the winds with the Himalayas mountains in the background at Chitkul village. Blue represents the sky, white





represents the air, red symbolizes fire, green symbolizes water, and yellow symbolizes the earth. All five colours together signify balance. The local Himachali women wear Dhatu, a 1-meter-long colourful head scarf. It protects the head from the cold breeze and is a part of traditional attire. The Dhatu is handcrafted primarily and comes in different fabrics, colours and patterns.







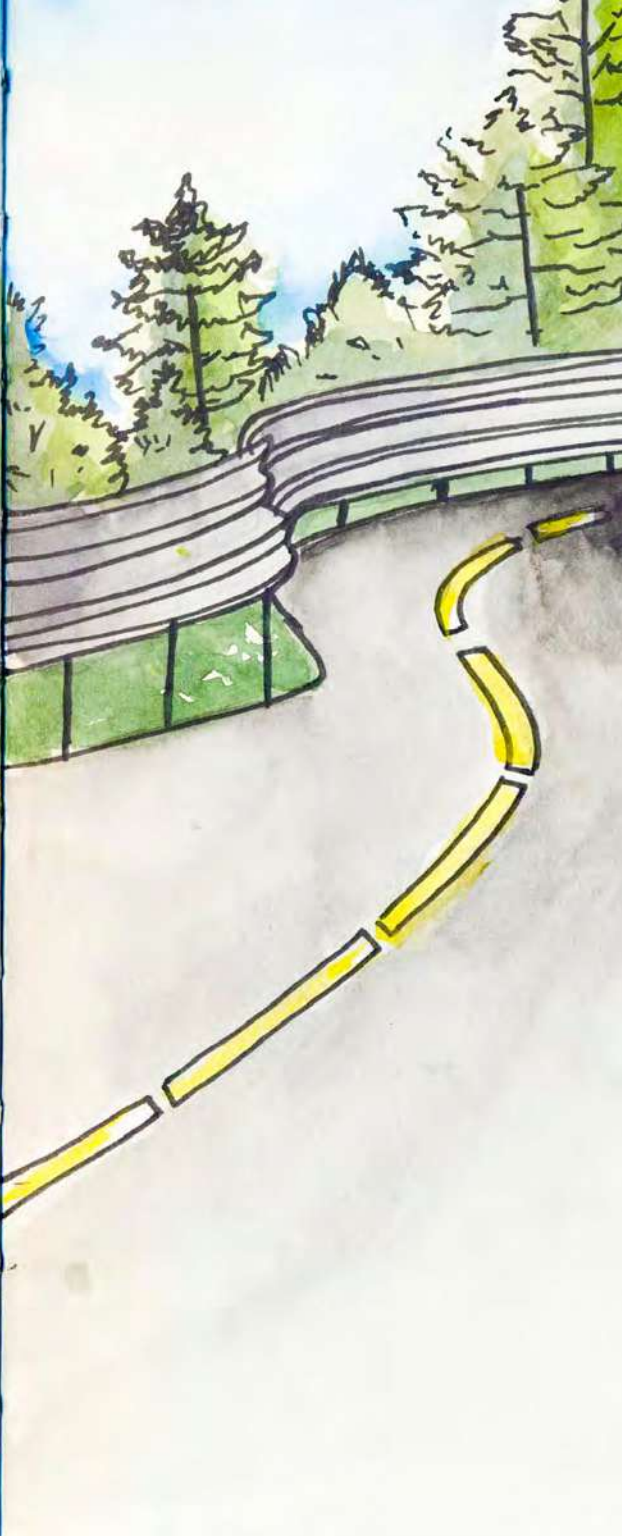
Himachal cap also known as Kinauri Topi in green colour is an essential part of the traditional costume of the people of Himachal.





The Kullvi Topi is woven in the traditional border patterns specific to the villages of Himachal Pradesh near the Rupin river.





~harshu







# Kalpa to Tabo

VIA NAKO AND GUE VILLAGE



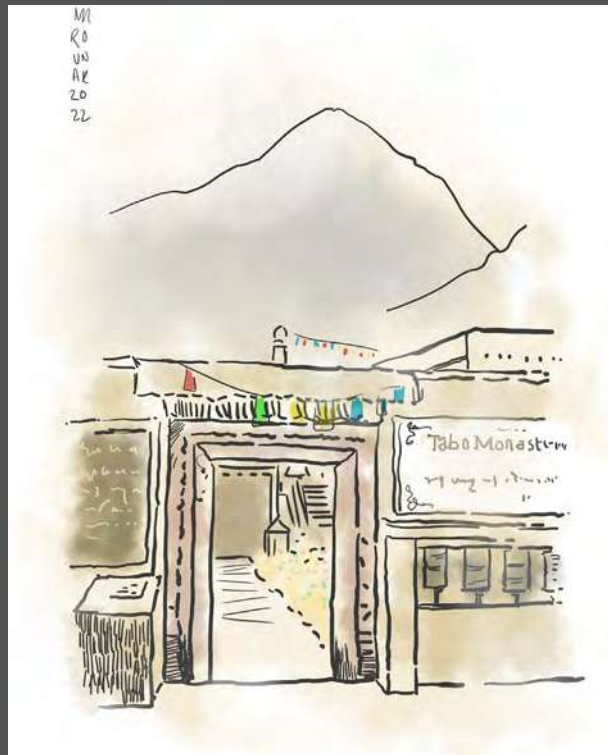








Around Kalpa, you will see some lovely apple and apricot orchards lining the landscape. Soon the terrain slowly changes to lesser trees and increasing rocky, dry kind of mountains as we enter the cold deserts. In the high mountains is the beautiful village called Nako. In Nako, being in upper Kinnaur and close to Spiti, one can see hints of Spitian life and architecture.







The famous Tabo Monastery, one of the oldest Buddhist centres in the Western Himalayas, is located in the Tabo village of Spiti Valley. Murals of the Tabo Monastery are pretty similar to Ajanta paintings.

The prayer wheels at the monasteries consist of a hollow metal cylinder, often beautifully embossed, mounted on a rod handle and containing a tightly wound scroll printed with a mantra. Each wheel turning by hand is equivalent in efficacy to the





prayer's oral recitation multiplied by the number of times the mantra is printed on the scroll.

On the advice of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tabo Monastery established Serkong School to help preserve Spiti Valley's tradition and give local youth a modern education. The school seeks to enable the younger generation of the valley to build their future based on the Tibetan culture, focusing its support on children and youth from poorer families and providing an education to the monks to equip them to promote the Bhoti















(Tibetan) language and Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist pilgrims in Himachal are very ardent and welcoming, and generally trek long distances on foot which is merely why they live a long healthy life. They are very much devoted to their religion and go from monastery to monastery educating the tourists about their culture. To the left are pictures showing a pilgrim whom we met on our way to the Gue village.



















The Tabo Monastery has nine temples, 23 chortens, a monk's chamber, and a nun's chamber. The meditation caves have been dug by hand into the side of the mountain. These were believed to be the abode of the Buddhist monks during the frigid Himalayan winters. It took 46 years to complete the monastery. Dimly lit rooms, mystical shrines, ancient murals, and Tibetan art forms make this one of India's most famous Buddhist monasteries.



The Buddhist prayer wheels are often inscribed with "Om Mani Padme Hum" (meaning "jewel in the lotus") in ornamental Lantsa (Ranjana) letters.











# Tabo to Kaza

VIA NAKO AND GUE VILLAGE











Dhankar Village and Monastery, situated at an elevation of 3,894 meters (12,774 feet), is the perfect setting for any monument in this world. The monastery complex is built on a high spur overlooking the confluence of the Spiti and Pin Rivers - one of the world's most spectacular settings for a Gompa.















Meaning a fort on a cliff, Dhankar was the capital of the Spiti Kingdom in the 17th century. Dhankar is located in the cold desert of Spiti Valley and looks like a bowl-shaped structure in the hills. It seems almost as if all the old Dhankar houses and fort have emerged straight from the mountains with their back wall merged on the hill. Houses in Himachal Pradesh are constructed in the 'Kath-Kuni' style. This style has both religious and cultural influences. In these traditional houses in Himachal Pradesh, the walls are made of stones and timber. The primary building materials employed in the construction are stone (igneous), wood and slate (metamorphic). Stone, usually granite, is used for foundational purposes. The walls are made of stone and wood, which are alternatively stacked up, one over another. Wood









with good compression and tension characteristics is interlocked in the corners with other wooden members. Deodar/ Kali wood (commonly available) is used as wall, flooring and roofing. Slate is used as a waterproofing roofing material to protect the building from heavy rain and snowfall. All the materials are locally available and are easily sourced.

Buddhist Stupa in front of the Sakya





Tangyud Monastery, one of the world's highest motorable monasteries at 4520 metres overlooking the Kaza village. The central structure consists of a hemispherical dome on a base, with a relic chamber deep within. The dome symbolizes, among other things, the dome of heaven enclosing the earth. It is surmounted by a squared railing (harmika) that can be said to represent the world's mountain. The Dhankar monastery was built approximately







one thousand years ago and now belongs to the Gelugpa School of order since the 1450s.

The World Monuments Fund recognizes Dhankar Monastery as one of the Hundred Most Endangered Sites in the world. The statue of Vairochana, or Meditating Buddha's idol, forms the centre of the monastery. Monastery has ancient murals, thankas, and Buddhist scriptures worth seeing. One can also find Buddhist scriptures in the Bhoti language.









# Around Kaza





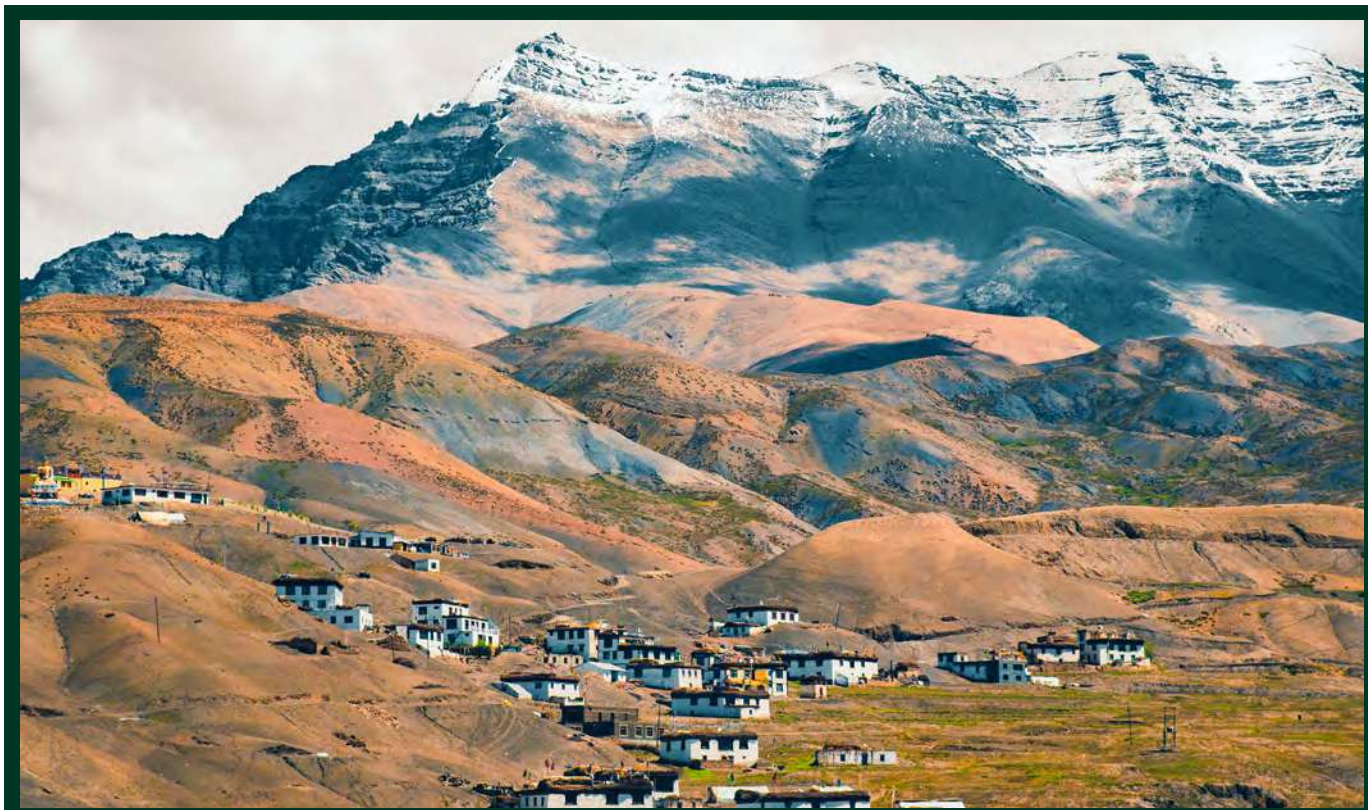






*Tea sellers next to the world's highest post office*





*Langza village, pictured here with the Chau Chau Kang Nilda mountains in the background*



*A restaurant at Komic village, the world's highest village connected by a motorable road.*

Langza Village, situated at an altitude of 4200 meters, is one of the most picturesque villages of Spiti, located on the highland meadows with snow-capped mountain ranges forming the backdrop. The village is adorned by a beautiful image of Buddha and an ancient temple more aptly called 'Lang', said to be the





*A tea seller with her child, at Langza*



*Statue of Buddha at Langza*



*Fossils found near Langza village*

abode of the deities of the region and over 1000 years old. The beautiful peak of Chau Chau Kang Nilda makes the view of this village even more beautiful. Langza is also well known for its rich fossil reserves as Spiti lay submerged under the Tethys Sea millions of years ago. These fossils are regularly found near the village. We also visited the monastery in Komic village, the highest village connected by a motorable road. The highest connected with a motorable road.





*Kye Monastery*



*A child playing with marbles in Kye Monastery*

Overlooking the Spiti river, Kye Monastery is said to be the largest and the most visited monastery in Spiti valley. The walls of the temples here are covered with beautiful murals and paintings that best depict 14th-century monastic architecture. We were offered tea by one of the monks there; it might have been the best we had ever had. The peace and solitude inside the monasteries was soul-soothing. We weren't allowed to click pictures of the monasteries from inside, but the images of the monasteries will stay with us and will keep reminding us of Spiti forever. Kye Monastery was established by a Buddha's Disciple named Drompton in the 11th century and is one of the leading training centres for Lamas in this region. It is situated at an altitude of 4115 metres. Numerous invasions, calamities and reconstructions have led to the monastery having a boxy look, like a fort of temples built on top of one another.

There are low rooms and narrow corridors, not-so-well-lit passages, complex staircases and small doors leading to prayer rooms that do not conform to a single design. Kye Monastery has Thangkas, valuable manuscripts of high aesthetic value,



unique wind instruments and a collection of weapons used to defend the monastery from attackers. The wind instruments are still put to use in summers during Chaam. Around June and July, the Kye Monastery celebrates a festival wherein Chaam dances are followed by a procession that reaches the ritual ground below the monastery. Here, a giant butter sculpture of a demon is set on fire.

Located about 15 km from the town of Kaza in Spiti Valley, Hikkim has a significant Buddhist population. For most of the months, this place remains cut off from the rest of the world due to heavy snowfall over the passes. The world's highest post office connected by a motorable road is found here, a bright red cylinder; it revels in its rarity, with many older women outside selling tea and postcards so that you can send a letter from the highest post office in the world. It is quite a long journey from here for the mail. All the posts and letters are first sent on foot to Kaza daily. These are then taken to Reckong Peo by bus and then to Shimla. Later, mails are loaded on a train and sent to Kalka; from here, a bus takes the cargo to Delhi. The mail's journey to its actual destination begins from Delhi. So, this entire mail trail involves a lot of sweat and hard work!

*Sending a letter from the world's highest post office*



*The world's highest post office connected with a motorable road*







*Kaza Monastery*



*Disciples outside Kaza Monastery*



*An old monk in the Kaza Monastery*



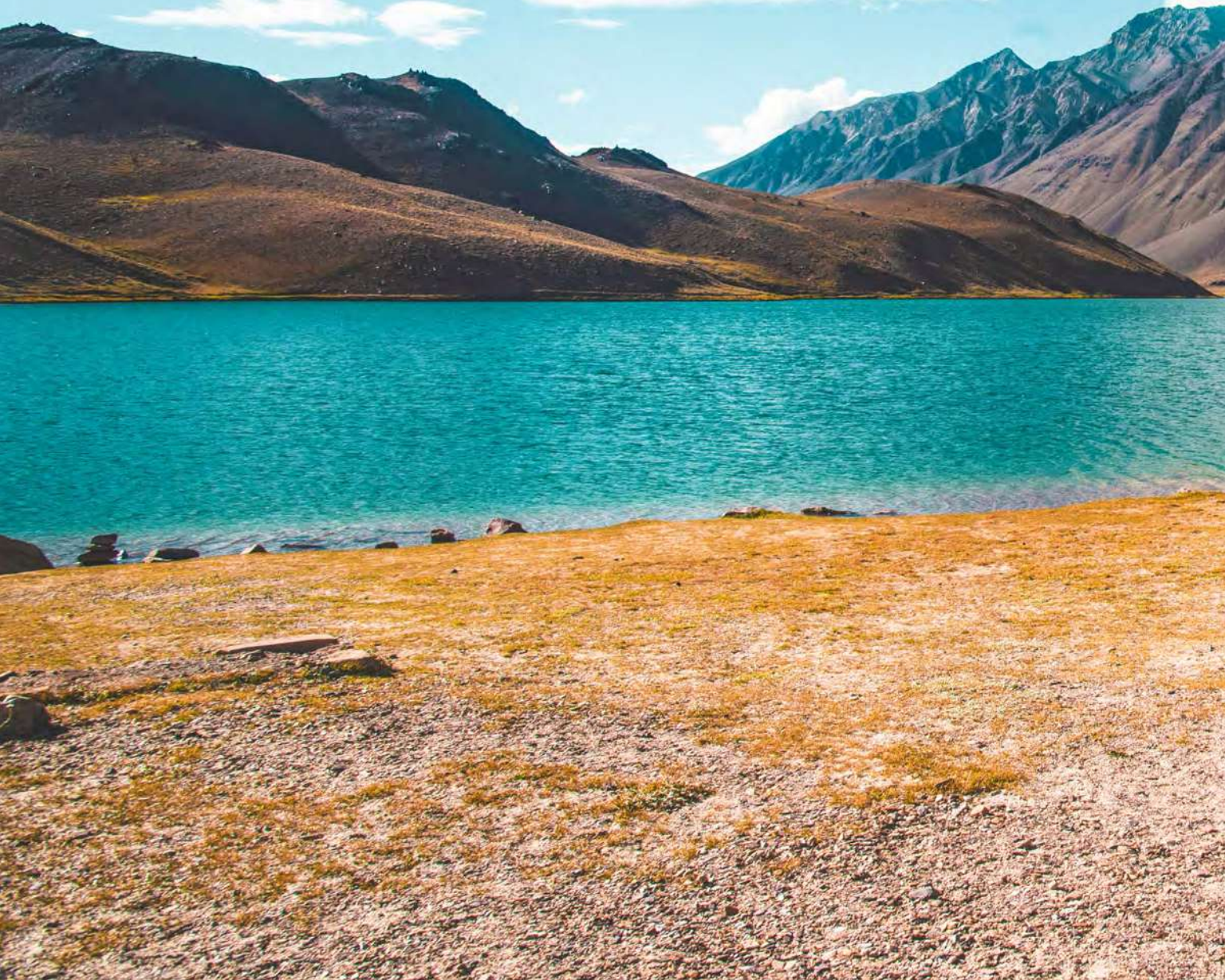


The Tanguyud Monastery or Sa-skya-gong-mig Gompa at the village of Komic, two km southeast of Hikkim in the Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, India, is built like a fortified castle on the edge of a deep canyon, with massive slanted mud walls and battlements with vertical red ochre and white vertical stripes which make them look much taller than they are. It is one of the highest altitude gompas (monasteries) in India, at an altitude of 4,520 meters, on the edge of a deep canyon and overlooking the town of Kaza, Spiti, 4 km to the west. It is located on the periphery of the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary.





# **Kaza to Manali**







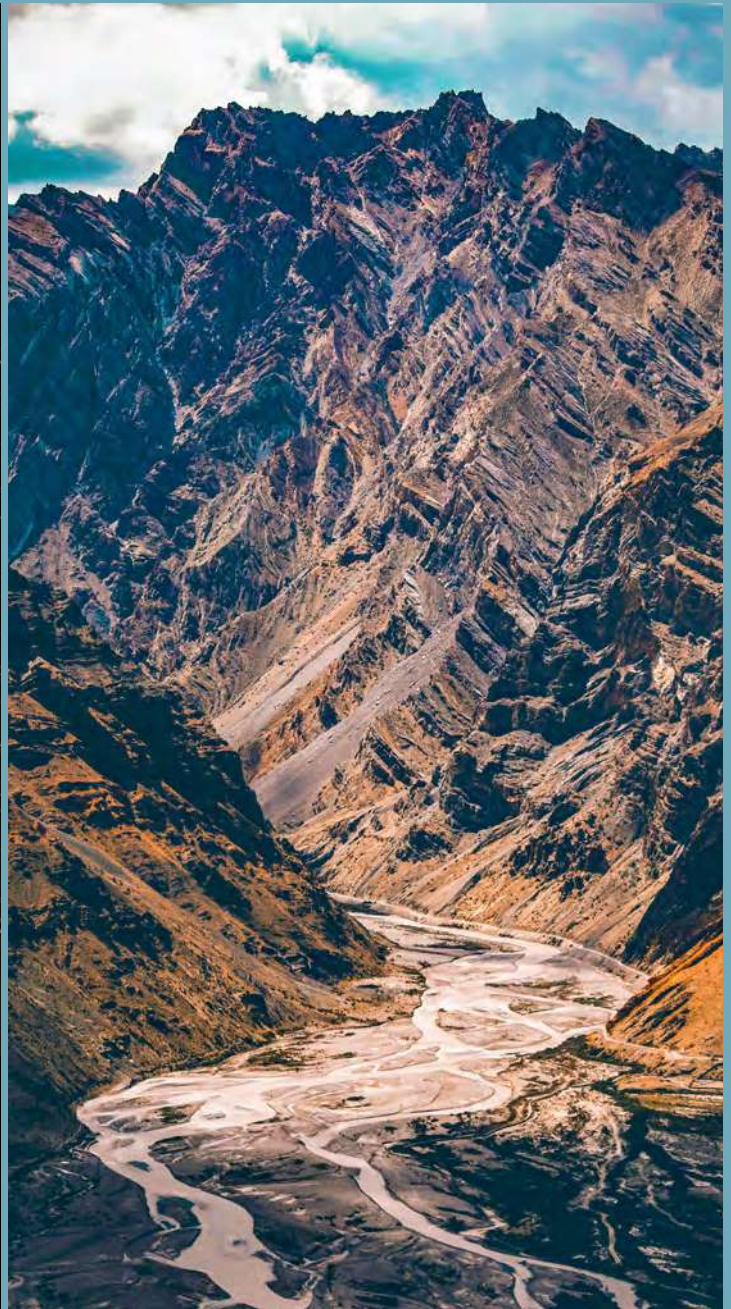




*Chandrataal Lake*

Chandrataal or the moon lake, is a crescent-shaped lake enclosed by mountains and a little greenery. After a small but steep drive, we reached a point from where we trekked about a kilometre to get to the lake. The trek was made arduous by the thin air at that altitude. However, the view of the blue lake and clear waters made it worth it.







*Kunzum temple*



*Statue of Buddha in Kunzum temple*



*Inside Kunzum Temple*

Kunzum Mata temple at Kunzum Pass. Be it bike drivers, or the locals anyone passing through the Kunzum pass stops and takes blessings from Mata for their treacherous journey ahead as the roads are very tricky. A big black stone lies inside the temple, and as per the legendary fable behind this temple, it is believed that if you pray with complete faith and put the coin on the stone, your wishes are fulfilled, and the coin will stick to the stone, else it will not.





*Chicham bridge*



*A child taking a break from selling food near the Chicham bridge*



*A close up of textures present on one of the structures in Kunzum Temple*







*Trishala Mahila Kutir Udyog Weaving Centre at Manali*









Sheep and goat rearing is the primary profession of the Gaddi tribe in Himachal Pradesh, who lead a tough life. The number of sheep and goats reared per household was about 120 and 49. The sheep and goats were grazed for 7 to 8 hrs a day on common forest/pasture lands during different seasons. Sheep wool is used to make traditional textiles like

the Kullu shawls or scarves, which are worn occasionally in the winter. The Kulvi weave symbolises the mystery of Himachal Pradesh. Among the handloom and handicrafts of Himachal Pradesh, the Kullu shawls are the most popular items. They are not only functional but bear an understated elegance. These shawls are trendy among locals and visitors. No





wonder any market in the Kullu region, especially Manali and other tourist spots, would have a few shops selling Kullu shawls. Kullu shawls are mostly made of three types of wool: Merino wool, Angora wool and Local sheep wool. These different kinds of yarn are sometimes used combined to make more varieties. Design patterns are primarily geometric shapes, with few exceptions where floral designs are used.









# Conclusion



The trip to Spiti Valley was a memorable, adventurous, and learning experience, especially in terms of Photography, the regional Craft and the Art of the Spiti Valley. The locals were very kind and helpful. Mountains surrounded every village we visited, and here many traditional practices are still carried on by the locals. We relished various Tibetan dishes, the Chexo and the Thenthuk. We saw numerous prayer wheels and murals in the monasteries made of wood, metal, and stone. We also visited the local market at Kaza and Manali. The market had various Tibetan keychains, Tibetan shawls and stoles, ponchos, and bags made from hemp. On the last day, we stopped at a place near Manali, where we visited the local weaving centre and enjoyed the experience of activities like zip lining, rolling balls, and bungee jumping.

This book is an effort to share our impressions, experiences and learning about the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, one of India's varied regional cultures and lifestyles.

We hope you like it!











