

TO ABHA's

# Half Day in Phyang



*Photograph: The Indian tantric Padamasambhava (lotus-born), one of the great masters of Buddhism practiced in Tibet*

# Half Day in Phyang

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## Know

- To the west of Leh, Phyang village in the Indus River Valley amid brown barren mountains commands lovely views of ***Mount Stok Kangri (6,120 meters)***. A tributary of the river glacial Phyang Nullah waters the fields laced with poplar trees and quenches the thirst of the villagers and their livestock. The fields of barley, corn, wheat, and vegetables are interspersed by ***flat roof houses***. ***Dzoes, a cross-breed of cows and yaks***, help the villagers in tilling the land stretching between an altitude of 3,500 and 3,600 meters.

- In this historic village of Leh Block, cave paintings of mountain goats have been found.
- The ruins of an old fort lie next to Lotsawa Lakhang.
- The village with unique traditions cannot escape attention of *cultural adventure* seekers. For example, Phyang does not have a common cremation ground. *Each house features a separate furnace called romkhang / ro-ong khang (the house of death / grave)*. Generally, these are simple structures, but rich families decorate and paint the furnace.
- Monastic art adorning Phyang Monastery is a medium to negotiate religious trail.

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## Go

Phyang does not occupy edge of the Leh-Srinagar Road (National Highway (NH1)). But approximately six-kilometer-long link road connects the highway to the village.

## Public buses and shared taxis

Mini buses ply between Leh and Phyang. The first bus starts from new bus stand around 7:30 am. About forty-five-minute journey costs INR 30 per passenger. The shared taxi (Maruti Van that can accommodate eight people.) also charges the same. Return buses are available at 9:00 am, 10:00 am, and

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3:00 pm during autumn. The buses are punctual.

## Private Taxi

Private taxis have fixed rates. No bargain is possible. The tariff depends on vehicle model. The taxi fare for the 2014-15 season follows:

- Leh-Phyang Monastery: INR 779 for Innova/Xylo
- Leh-Phyang Monastery-Leh: INR 1012 for Innova/Xylo
- Leh-Phyang Monastery: INR 740 for Qualis, Safari, and Scorpio

- Leh-Phyang Monastery-Leh: INR 961 for Qualis, Safari, and Scorpio
- Leh-Phyang Monastery: INR 703 for Sumo and van
- Leh-Phyang Monastery-Leh: INR 913 for Sumo and van

See

## **Phyang Monastery's Monastic Art: a Medium for Religious and Spiritual Success**

Art is attractive. Art invites attention of people to even boring, consuming, and mysterious subjects like religion.

Monastic art is a tribute to religion and is a means to draw and to hold attention

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of casual and dedicated devotees. You may be either of the two. Phyang Monastery would catch your attention because of modern paintings in bold colors, ancient murals, and annual mask dance (*cham*) performances. Popularity of the accessible monastery tempts mass tourists. If none of these reasons finds favor with you, the location of the monastery would definitely coax you.

The monastery affords pretty views of the village and the Stok Range, offering *a vantage point for landscape photographers and beauty seekers.*

Phyang Monastery (Tashi Chhusung / Blue Peak) is dedicated to Dri-gung-pa sect, a sub division of Kargyupa (Red

Hat) sect of the Tibetan Buddhism. The sixteenth century monastery on a spacious mound hosts an annual festival, Phyang Tseruk (Gang Sngon Tsedup), in July-August. During the festival, *cham* (mask) dances to kill evil draw locals and numerous travelers from across the world. The next festival would take place on July 24-25, 2014. After every three years, the five-storey tall *thangka* (a religious painting) is unfurled from the monastery during the celebrations. This auspicious event is scheduled for 2016.

The monastery name is derived from the Gang Ngonpo, a blue mountain

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rising behind the monastery. The monastery is an ancient protected monument of national importance.

According to a legend, Danma Kungha Tagspa lama from Tibet successfully treated King Tashi Namgyal suffering from leprosy. The king rewarded him with land and money to build the monastery. The monastery facing south has tiered structure. The lower levels host lamas, whereas the upper levels are earmarked for deities and gurus. The main prayer hall (*dukhang*) is decorated with high-quality murals that match the mural style followed in Basgo monastery. The hall also houses stucco images of Kun-d'ga Grags-pa, the founder of the monastery and Dam-chos'gyur-med, the head lama. The old

*dukhang* is more than five and half centuries old.

A group of Kashmiri bronze statues carved before fourteenth century is the highlight of the monastery. Beautiful murals of Marpa, Mila-Raspa, Naropa, and Tilopa of the Kagyu-pa family and Vajradhara embellish the *gonkhang*.

An ancient museum room houses Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan amours and weapons. *Tso-khang*, *gonkhang*, and *dukhang* walls are richly decorated with paintings.

The maroon color shrine dedicated to Mahakala is probably the oldest structure within the monastery complex.

## Photography

Photography is only prohibited inside the temples located within the monastery.

## Monastery Time

Lunch hours: 12:00 pm-1:00 pm

## Lotsawa Lakhang: Little Temple with Wide Views

The Lotsawa Lakhang (the Translator's Temple) is dedicated to Padma Sambhava, the famous Indian tantric of the eighth century. The temple is called Lotsawa Lakhang because it belongs to

the end of Rinchen Zangpo-period. Rinchen Zangpo is a famous monk who commissioned construction of 108 temples in Ladakh and translated Buddhist documents into Tibetan from Indian languages. The ruins of the fortress are a few steps away from the temple lending itself to sweeping views of the village.

A low wooden door opens into the one-room dark temple. The flat roof rests on two columns of wood. The altar between the columns features idols of Padma Sambhava, Milarepa and Ningmapa Red Hat-sect's lama. The columns are decorated with old *thangkas* and with old weapons. The colorful *chorten* of wood features images of the guardians of the four

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main directions (Lokapalas). The guardians are dressed in royal costumes.

The walls are adorned with white, blue, and red color frescoes. The theme of the frescoes includes Bodhisattvas, Buddha, mythical beasts, and Mahakala. The wall paintings, epitomizing Tibetan art of the thirteenth century, are believed to be of Lakhang Soma (Alchi) period.

The ***“mighty (Maha) black (Kala)” protector deity finds*** his rightful place near the entrance on the left and right side walls. The wall near right side of the main door features eight figures of Mahakala. The power of the protector becomes more pronounced with his two

figures having four-arms and six-arms. The deity's ornaments include garlands of skulls and other typical attributes. On the left wall, a crow having a human body represents the protective deity. The crow painting shows nine faces, two horns, a pair of tiny wings, and a big beak.

The wall opposite to the door is decorated with blue medicine Buddha holding an herb bowl in the left hand, golden color Shakyamuni Buddha, and red color Amithaba, the Buddha of light.

However, the wall paintings are fading. The cracks have already developed in the walls.

A steep path goes to the white washed



temple. The keys of the temple are with Norbu Gasha who lives nearby. Enquire with villagers and they will call him to open the temple door.

If you are not religious-minded, still walk the extremely short trail to get a wide view of the village.

## Do

### Stroll

Stroll through the village. Do not rush. Have a look at rock formations. You may spot feathery and winged residents of the village. Absorb the beauty and simplicity of the village and the community.

For *thrill seekers*, the village falls on famous **trekking routes**:

- Nubra Valley Trek via Lasermo-La,
- Sham Trek, and
- Bokbok-La

## Stay

If you like the village, you may extend your trip. However, the hotel scene in the village is not at all encouraging. The village does not have hotels. You will find basic budget accommodations in guesthouses, home stays, and or camping sites. The bed count is also very limited. But, you will get a double room for up to INR 1,000 per night.

Since the village has only a few stay options, book the accommodation well in advance.

**Hidden North Guesthouse**, a “village based accommodation,” offers double bed rooms with or without en suite bathrooms fitted with cold and hot showers. The guesthouse offers basic rooms with monastery and valley views. Hidden can accommodate eighteen (18) guests in the rooms.

The room tariff varies from INR 600 per night for a double room with shared bath to INR 1,000 per night for a double room with attached bathroom. The corresponding extra bed tariff is INR 200 and INR 300. During Phyang Festival (July 23-24, 2014), the

tariff may go up by 20%. Hidden also has a camping site.

The dining hall with indoor and outdoor spaces faces Mount Stok Kangri. Home-made meals are served on request.

Three full meals cost INR 600 per person, per day.

Limited parking service and lockers are complimentary. Electricity and hot water supply may not be available at a regular time.

The guesthouse also has international and local phone call facility.

Wi Fi is available for a fee (INR 120 per hour), very expensive.

The guesthouse library offers books and magazines for a constructive leisure.

Website: <http://www.hiddennorth.com/www/index.php?>

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**Norbu Gasha**, the caretaker of Lotsawa Lakhang, also offers accommodation for up to four people in his house on request. The tariff is not pre-decided, but a reasonable donation is expected.

### *Other Registered Guesthouses*

- Druk
- Gondhar
- Neyamchan
- Yartsa Garden

# Experience: Phyang in Pictures



**1. Mount Stok Kangri ( 6,120 meters / 20, 196 feet)**

**3. Amithaba Buddha has red body and clothes. He holds a bowl of beggar and sits in meditation posture.**

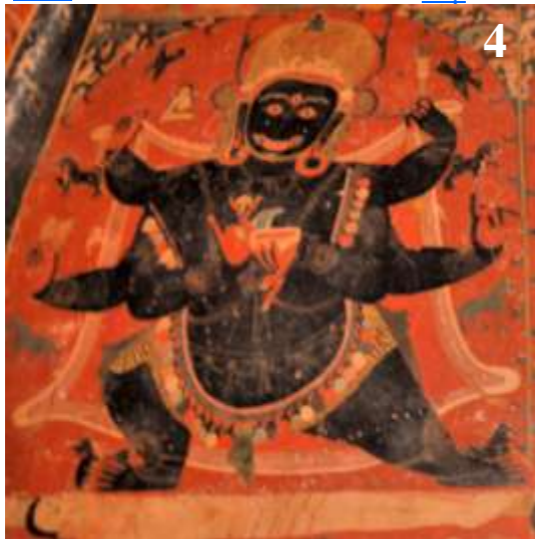
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## 2. Phyang Monastery



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**4. A figure of Mahakala with three pairs of arms in Lotsawa Lakhang**

**5. Autumn is awesome in Phyang.**

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## Tip

To explore more, leave behind the vehicles. Stroll.

## Trivia

- Do not confuse Phiyang with the capital of North Korea (Pyong Yang) which is also pronounced somewhat similarly.
- In August 2010, a cloud burst caused flash floods and damaged several houses in the village.

# Thanks!

# Happy Himalayan Holidays!

Contact Us:

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**Photograph: Lotsawa Lhakhang and ruins of the fortress**

**More...**

Tour Phyang online. Visit over desktop website for full preview of the attractions:

- [Phyang in Autumn](#)
- [Lotsawa Lhakhang: The Temple of Translator](#)
- [Phyang Monastery: Religious Art and Architecture](#)

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