

Trekking

(Guidelines & Regulations)

The Department of Tourism,
The Administration of Union Territory of
Ladakh



TREKKING IN LADAKH

Ladakh offers a range of mountains full of adventure treks for trekking enthusiasts. Truly a paradox of nature, this landscape of excesses has countless beautiful supplies of nature—from the desert to blue waters, scorching sun to freezing winds, and from glaciers to dunes. Trekking in Ladakh is every hiker's dream walking past the desert mountains into the narrow passes, and over the highest roads, the Ladakh trekking experience is perhaps the best in the country, if not in the world.

If you are the adventurous kind, missing these treks in Ladakh is not wise. It is one of the most appreciated and adventurous activities in the region. Ladakh is a major trekking destination for trekkers in India and has the potential to become a global trekking destination.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh to streamline and promote adventure activities in Ladakh in a regulated manner is issuing the Guidelines & Regulations for carrying out Trekking. These guidelines shall extend to the whole of the Union Territory of Ladakh and come into force from the date of its notification.

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh recommends following the guidelines & regulations for Trekking, issued by the Adventure Tour Operators Associations of India (ATOAI) and endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

These guidelines will act as a defining force with respect to the procedures to be followed, mandatory trainings for guides/instructors, equipment to be used, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), necessary documentation, risk mitigation processes, addressing medical concerns, emergencies, rescue operations, safety briefing, etc. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) shall follow these guidelines while conducting Trekking in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

VALIDITY

The 'Guidelines & Regulation for Trekking' will remain valid for five (5) years, from the date of its notification. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) are advised to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of these guidelines and follow its best implementation for the sustainable development of the adventure tourism ecosystem in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

ENCLOSURES

- Annexure 1 – Guidelines & Regulations for Trekking in the Union Territory of Ladakh
- Annexure 2 – Implementation Framework for the Union Territory of Ladakh

ANNEXURE 1 GUIDELINES & REGULATIONS FOR TREKKING

1. INTRODUCTION

With 73 percent of the Himalayan range in India, trekking has become the most popular adventure activity in the country. These Basic Minimum Standards will apply specifically to commercial trekking expeditions across the country and at altitudes above 2,000 meters.

2. GUIDES / INSTRUCTORS

1. Those who are leading trekking activities must be skilled and qualified to lead trekking groups. Trek leaders should have a certificate issued by an MOT recognized adventure tour operator stating that the individual “has experience of 3 years in assisting trekking expeditions at altitudes of 2000 Mt. or minimum 10 climbs above 2000 Mt. (for guiding in the Himalayas minimum 5 climbs above 4500 Mt.) reflected in a logbook duly authenticated or validated by the operator and the clients. And above and is independently capable of guiding trekking groups and carrying out rescue operations” OR, Completed the Basic Mountaineering Course from any of the National Mountaineering Institutes and carry a certificate duly authenticated by an Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) recognized body OR IMF accredited tour operator.
2. Maintain a logbook containing authenticated records of trekking experience.
3. Must have a valid certification of a minimum 16-hour (2-day) first aid and CPR course provided by a recognized and qualified provider. The maximum group size should be fixed depending on the nature of the trek. The treks can be divided into different categories like Low Altitude Treks/ Glacier Treks/ High Altitude Treks/ Trekking Expeditions, etc.

3. EQUIPMENT CARES AND MAINTENANCE

1. The correct use and proper maintenance of trekking equipment are essential for conducting trekking activities and should never be taken lightly.
2. Trekking equipment such as tents, sleeping bags, etc should be appropriate for the terrain in which it is being used.
3. All equipment is subject to wear and tear and must be checked before every use. Operators and leaders must have sound knowledge of this and have systems in place to control and manage their equipment. Equipment must be stored properly and inspected periodically. Unserviceable equipment should be discarded immediately. Operators and leaders must have sound knowledge of this and have systems in place to control and manage their equipment.

4. INSPECTIONS & MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES

Inspection and maintenance require a sound knowledge of the systems and equipment and must be carried out by qualified persons, as a minimum the inspector must be a qualified guide/instructor. Basic inspections must be carried out before every use with detailed inspections carried out regularly in accordance with their operational procedures and risk assessments.

5. SOPs & OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

1. All Trekking Tour Operators must maintain and update a standard operating procedure for their operations and get the same vetted from ATOAI from time to time. SOPs should be in accordance with risk management practices recommended by ATOAI.
2. SOP for organizing the trekking expedition, such as assessing members' qualifications, medical condition, and experience, procedures for obtaining various permissions, travel to the trekking area, maintenance of base camp including hygiene, precautions for avoiding high altitude sickness, safety precautions, communication, weather reports, the procedure for emergencies, communication protocol, casualty evacuation, incident and accident reporting, and feedback mechanism must be well documented and part of staff training. The following must be included in the SOPs:
 - The guiding and porter staff on the mountain and the material supply must be adequate for the party and the stated level of service offered.
 - Advance arrangements must be known for medical help. Advance arrangements must also be made for evacuation assistance in case of emergency. A detailed Emergency Action Plan must be in position and communicated to all concerned before the commencement of the trek.
 - Advertising must give a true picture of all the difficulties and dangers involved and avoid promising the impossible. For commercial trekking expeditions, information about the guiding team and their experience should be sent to the clients beforehand.
 - The client must truthfully reveal his experience, supported by documentation/photographs, medical history, etc. to the organizer so that the organizer can make an informed choice about the potential client. For high-altitude treks, a doctor's fitness certificate for clients is recommended.

- Information supplied in advance will include a clear statement of the guiding, portage, and equipment which will be supplied by the organizer, together with a detailed gear/clothing list for the clients.
- Sustainability guidelines: In accordance with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria adopted by ATOAI with strong adherence to the 'leave no trace policy.

6. DOCUMENTATION

The tour operator must maintain, at the minimum the following documentation:

1. Details of all Guides and Instructors including copies of certifications, a record of trekking experience, and feedback from clients.
2. Copies of all Permits and Permissions of current trekking expeditions.
3. Copies of identification documents, Insurance cover, and details of next of kin for all participants, guides, and instructors.
4. Copy of SOP.
5. Current list of emergency contact numbers.
6. Emergency Action Plan for the trek.

7. RISK MITIGATION

To mitigate the risk of high-altitude trekking, the following is advised:

1. To get participants medically examined before starting on the journey. A visit to a dentist is also recommended before multi-day treks.
2. Unless guided by a highly experienced guide, at least two members of the party have experience in high-altitude trekking with valid First Aid/ CPR certification.
3. Ensure that environmental safeguards are implemented in their program so that the area visited by them suffers no damage and is left clean for subsequent expeditions.
4. The operator must ensure that a comprehensive risk assessment is done and properly documented before operating any trekking expedition.

8. EMERGENCIES AND RESCUES

1. Adequate first aid medical equipment must be available with the party. For high-altitude treks, an oxygen cylinder and Gamow bag are recommended.
2. Evacuation routes must be identified and known to participants, guides and instructors.
3. A detailed and documented emergency action plan with emergency contact numbers must be available with the party along with the closest available emergency services which can be called upon as required.

9. SAFETY BRIEFING

1. Safety briefing should be given on daily basis by the lead guide/trip leader.
2. Where significant risks have been identified, lead guides should explain these risks and advise clients of any action needed to safeguard themselves.
3. Local guides/trip leaders' primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the clients, support staff, and themselves.
4. This requirement comes before all other responsibilities and the lead guides/trip leaders should be assured that any decision made by them to ensure the safety of all will be supported by the company.
5. Safety briefing should also include information about weather forecast (if available), elevation profile, time taken on the trail, hazards, hydration, and trail hygiene.

10. MEDICAL CONCERNS

1. Local guides/trip leaders should be aware of any common health problems that may affect trekking expeditions and know how to tackle those problems. This may include environment-related conditions such as hypothermia, sunstroke, or altitude sickness.
2. The lead guide/trip leaders should be aware of any pre-existing medical conditions/ allergies within the group and this information should be checked during the main briefing. The lead guide must speak to the client/s who declare such conditions to gain a clear understanding of the medical concern.
3. The lead guide/trip leaders must be aware of the local / nearest possible emergency services available and how to contact them.
4. Must carry First Aid / Medical kit with emergency medicines as required and it is absolutely important that first aid kits are routinely checked for the expiration of medicines and serviceability and replaced as necessary.

11. BASIC MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GRANT OF RECOGNITION TO OPERATORS

1. The operator should have a minimum of three qualified staff including the owner of the firm. Either the Owner / Director or their Operations - Chief should be well qualified in the trekking activity with recognized national or international certification or a minimum of three years of practical experience.
2. The operators must have their adventure equipment.
3. The field staff of Adventure Tour Operator must be qualified for the activity or must have a minimum of three years of practical experience.
4. Field staff of the company must be qualified in First-Aid / C.P.R. by the Red Cross or equivalent body or Certificate Course conducted by the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India.
5. The company must sign an undertaking for adherence to sustainable practices and protection of the environment in keeping with the guidelines for ecotourism and safety guidelines of the Ministry of Tourism / Adventure Tour Operator Association of India.
6. The company must maintain in its office premises all the maps and reference material.
7. The company must have a printed brochure or website clearly describing its:
 - present activities
 - Its area of operation
 - Its commitment to follow Ecotourism guidelines / GSTC guidelines adopted by ATOAI
8. The company must follow a strict 'leave no trace policy and conform to high sustainability standards.

Draft

ANNEXURE 2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

1. CONSTITUTION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Technical Committee' for Trekking with the following members:

Composition of the Technical Committee	
Director (Tourism), UT Ladakh	Chairperson
Chief Wildlife Warden / Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Principal ISM, Kargil Branch	Member
Principal FCI/ IHM, Leh	Member
Representative of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Trekking	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Trekking	Member
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Convening Member

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Inspect and certify the equipment with the operator from a safety point of view.
- Scrutinize the credential of the personnel responsible for conducting Trekking, the medical fitness of the guide, and conduct their physical test to ascertain their expertise.
- Ensure that the operator and the guide shall follow all safety procedures indicated in their rules.
- Identify new areas/ routes/ tracks for Trekking in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Notify the exact stretches on the identified areas/ routes/ tracks where the operation can be safely conducted, considering the area's environmental sensitivity, critical wildlife hotspots and fragile water systems.
- Formulate a plan for containing the environmental impact strictly inside the designated activity area.
- Forecast the potential ecological impacts and ensure a plan for eco-conditioning to minimize the impact and offsetting the potential environmental impact.
- Ensure preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Matrix, and Emergency & Evacuation plan.
- Ensure preparation of a plan for tourist awareness and education.
- Determine the capacity of each track every year before the start of any operation.

3. CONSTITUTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Regulatory Committee' for Trekking with the following members:

Composition of the Regulatory Committee	
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Chairperson
Wildlife Warden or Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Representative of the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF)	Member
Representative of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)	Member
SHO/Choki of the Concerned Area	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Trekking	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Trekking	Member
Officer in-charge of the Department of Tourism, UT Ladakh at Sub-Division and Tehsils	Convening Member

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Regulatory Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Overall control for regulating the Trekking operations, in coordination with the concerned stakeholders and associations.
- Surprise inspections during the Trekking operations to ascertain adherence of the guidelines, assess the quality & condition of equipment being used and assess the ecological impact, to help develop adaptive management strategies. The Regulatory Committee shall constitute a joint inspection or verification team with the Department of Youth Services & Sports, UT Ladakh and Adventure Sports Association, if any.

- Establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints, concerns, and feedback from local communities, tourists, and stakeholders.
- Any other functions concerning Trekking operations in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

5. CLAIM ON ACCOUNT OF ANY MISHAP

The Department of Tourism, or any other Department/ Authority of the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, in no way be responsible for any claims on account of any mishap.

6. SHOW CAUSE NOTICE

If any operator, guide, or personnel responsible for conducting Trekking operations is found to be violating these Guidelines & Regulations for Trekking, appropriate action shall be taken by the Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.

Draft