



**Global** | **Learning  
Across  
Borders**

EXPERIENCE MATTERS<sup>®</sup>

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**From Brahma to Buddha:  
The Cultures of the Indian Himalayas and the Ganges River**  
Spring/Fall Semester Program



• *Whenever I meet a 'foreigner', I always have the same feeling: 'I am meeting another member of the human family.' This attitude has deepened my affection and respect for all beings. May this natural wish be my small contribution to world peace. I pray for a more friendly, more caring, and more understanding human family on this planet To all those who dislike suffering, who cherish lasting happiness, this is my heartfelt appeal.*

--Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet who lives in exile in Dharamsala, India.



Exploring a traditional village perched on the Tibetan Plateau. Sipping butter tea around a kitchen fire. Smelling jasmine flowers and curries sold in the bazaar. Hearing horns and bells echoing over ancient monastery walls. Watching colorful prayer flags blowing in the wind on top of a mountain pass. Throughout this India program, participants will have the chance to live and study in the country that gave birth to many of the world's major religions—Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism to name a few—and to travel amid some of the most spectacular landscapes on earth. On this "Brahma to Buddha" journey, we strive to achieve understanding through direct interaction with these religions, spiritual practices, and India's myriad and rich cultures. We will meet many individuals who keep ancient traditions and spiritual practices alive, including possible audiences with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and/or His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa. We'll challenge our own assumptions and stereotypes about India and its people, religions and spiritual practices, and we'll experience first-hand how these traditions continue to influence the lives of people all over the globe today. Though it is impossible to predict the most memorable experience you will have during this Global Learning Across Borders™ (Global LAB) India semester, those who participate can expect to embark on a path to discovery that may well last a lifetime.

## Primary Locations

### Ladakh

*Few things could be lonelier than that landscape of storm-beaten rose-brush and rock, and yet I never felt alone. All round me, along the path, in the willow grove, by the stream, on and between the rocks, there were signs that others had passed the same way. Prayer flags shook out their yellow and red rags from the heart of a gully or from the tops of crags above me; stones arranged in half circles, in sacred letters...I came to the fork in the path and looked up. There, half a mile above me, was the monastery; there Go-Tsang was at last, high in its cradle of rock, with nothing but the wide, burning sky behind it.*

--Andrew Harvey, "A Journey in Ladakh"

High on the Tibetan Plateau in India's northern-most region is the former kingdom of Ladakh. Known as "Little Tibet", Ladakh has been open to foreigners only since 1974. Prior to 1962, when the threat of Chinese invasion prompted the rapid construction of a road into the region, travel to Ladakh involved several weeks of difficult walking at high altitudes. Over the centuries, many teachers, nomads, traders, and pilgrims did make this journey over mountain passes, across vast plains and from one sparsely settled town to the next, most with ancient monasteries built into the cliffs above the villages. Because of the nearly impassable Himalayan ranges to the south and southwest, almost all of Ladakh's cultural influences came from its neighbor in the other direction—Tibet.



As you walk through some of the quiet side streets of Leh, Ladakh's capital, it is easy to think that you've stepped back in time and are wandering through a traditional Tibetan town before the Chinese invasion. In fact, as many experienced travelers have noticed, Ladakh is one of the very few regions in the world

where Tibetan Buddhism and all its cultural forms have flourished without interruption since introduced more than a millennium ago. This continuity and endurance of a religious tradition and the people that support it, set in a landscape of austere and formidable beauty, help make Ladakh one of the world's most magical destinations.

### Jaipur, Rajasthan



In the desert "Land of Kings," Rajasthan, it is possible to paint an image of important periods of Indian history—including the current trends of social and academic development. The capital city of Jaipur, founded by Jai Singh in 1727, is one of India's most meticulously planned cities with roads and markets deliberately organized according to ancient Hindu astrology. Our program here reaches deeply into the tradition of Jainism and toward an understanding of non-violence in one's daily life. Scholars and NGO (non-governmental organization) workers will help us understand how religion and spiritual practice informs generosity and the ability to give back to our local communities. Craft and art traditions that have been passed along familial lines for generations are accessible for exploration, including: block printing, metal work, jewelry, and paper design. Our program allows you to take a second look at these crafts, considering green design and appropriate technologies that minimize environmental

impacts while also supporting local economies. Jaipur is the meeting-point of the ancient warrior clans—the Rajputs—and its setting of towering forts and castles will be conducive to a complex and revealing reverie. In one romantic moment, imagining how it might have felt to be a princess during the reign of the British Raj...while in another humane moment, absorbing Gandhi and his teachings, its spawn of non-violence movements, and their influence on Indian Independence.

### Dharamsala - McLeod Ganj

From a modest monastery on the side of a hill, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the world's Tibetan Buddhists, holds quiet court in the bustling town of McLeod Ganj. In this town perched on a ridge, tucked inside the folds and valleys of the foothills of the Indian Himalayas, prayer wheels spin in the hands of the faithful while novice red-robed monks in-training dart through the streets. Over the last 50 years, Tibetans have transformed this former British hill station into what is now known as "Little Lhasa." Dharamsala is home to the Central Tibetan Administration, as well as dozens of monasteries and important cultural organizations such as the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives. With a vibrant mix of people—local Himachali, Kashmiri, and Tibetan—conducting sacred daily rituals, bargaining in open markets and shops, and having lively discussions about Buddhist philosophy, McLeod Ganj is an endlessly fascinating town. It is a place where one can gain a deeper understanding of the political dynamics of historical Tibet. It is also where Tibetan traditions of medicine, astrology, law, religion, language, and the arts are preserved and nurtured. In short, McLeod Ganj is one of the epicenters of Tibetans living in exile in India.



## Optional Location

### Varanasi (Banaras)

*Banaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old of all of them put together.* --Mark Twain

A thriving holy city whose history goes back nearly two thousand years, Varanasi, also known as Banaras, continues to be a fascinating, bustling destination. Here one can observe religious practitioners and festive celebrations, as well as somber cremation ceremonies on the funeral pyres along the steps, or *ghats*, on the banks of the Ganges River. Walking among the narrow cobblestone streets of the Old City, we visit the most sacred Shiva temple in all of India and take boat rides on the Ganges at sunrise. We will have the opportunity to watch traditional dances performed on the steps of a Hindu temple, attend a candlelight sitar and *tabla* concert and drink many cups of chai with inhabitants of this intriguing city. Eleven kilometers away is the sacred Buddhist city of Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first teaching after reaching enlightenment. A visitor to Sarnath can listen to Zen chanting and drumming in the Japanese temple, hear monks offering Tibetan prayers, take a turn spinning prayer wheels at the Tibetan temple, and make visits to Chinese Buddhist and Thai Buddhist temples to witness examples of religious ritual and tradition from those cultures as well. Each of the Buddhist temples in Sarnath is constructed in the traditional style found in the host country that built the temple. Resident monks from all over Asia maintain temples in this holy city.



### **Semester Program Overview**

*Please note that due to many reasons, this itinerary is subject to change. An updated itinerary will be posted on the appropriate India semester blog.*

We begin our program with a flight to New Delhi, the capital of India. After a few days of orientation in Delhi—including exploring one of the most colorful markets in Asia, Chandni Chowk, India's largest mosque, Jama Masjid, and the historic

Red Fort of the old city—we will fly over the Himalayas onto the Tibetan Plateau and land in Leh, the capital of Ladakh. We will spend our first few days in Leh, acclimatizing to the altitude and getting oriented to the new region and culture. We will meet with local people working with NGOs on issues of sustainable development and cultural preservation and begin to develop our own understanding of the challenges Ladakh has been facing in recent decades. Here we will also start our Ladakhi language lessons, designed to be both practical and fun.

Next we will head to a traditional village in the Indus River valley where we will stay with Ladakhi families and continue our cultural orientation in a rural, traditional community. We will likely assist with harvesting barley and other crops, milking cows and dzo, and learning and participating in other components of daily life. Students will enjoy traditional meals with their families and will spend the bulk of each day with the group participating in guided tours, lectures, and discussions about culture, religion, politics, and environmental issues.

We will also make excursions to a number of the nearby cultural sites and monasteries in the Indus River Valley, exploring as far east as Hemis and as far west as Lamayuru. We may have the honor of an audience with the Thiksay Oracle; we'll visit the SECMOL hostel which is supporting the next generation in exploration about sustainable agriculture, energy production, and media issues; and we'll help with other projects as requested by local organizations.

At the conclusion of this phase of the program, we will enjoy a farewell gathering with our families and then travel even further into rural Ladakh. Here, we begin an 8-10 day trek that will take us over 17,000 foot passes to remote villages and unsettled areas. The trek brings us through some of the most beautiful parts of the Himalayas and may provide views of several of the tallest mountains in the world. Because of the isolation of the region, we will feel as though we are stepping back into time as we camp in fields along the trail or stay in small villages along our route.



After the trek, we will fly from Leh to New Delhi. We will then take the train north to the Punjab region of India where we will spend a couple days in Amritsar, staying with Sikh pilgrims at the sacred Golden Temple. Here we will volunteer in the kitchens with pilgrims, visit the Jallianwalabagh (Amritsar Massacre Site), and learn about the challenges this region has faced due to partition and its complicated demographics. One evening we will go to the India/Pakistan border at Wagah and witness the flag-lowering ceremony where nationalistic fervor is still apparent on both sides of the border.

Next we will catch the morning commuter train to Patankot, and then connect to a local bus to McLeod Ganj, the home of the Central Tibetan Administration. As guests of this community, we will live with contemporary Tibetan families, meet Tibetan doctors, teachers, and political prisoners, and learn something of these Himalayan people who have bravely persevered as refugees and maintained their cultural identity for the past 50 years in exile. A weekend excursion to Tso Pema will be another adventure during our time in Dharamsala; there we will visit an important pilgrimage center associated with Guru Rinpoche who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. During this portion of the program, we will also request audiences with religious leaders, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness the Karmapa, the young head of one of Tibetan Buddhism's most important lineages, who came to India from Tibet in 2001. Also while spending time in this community, we will attend an "Introduction to Buddhism" retreat at the Tushita Meditation Centre, completing our inquiry into the practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

In McLeod Ganj, Independent Study Project (ISP) options include: studying Tibetan massage; practicing yoga; receiving musical training on the traditional Tibetan guitar, *dramyen*, or the traditional Indian drum, *tabla*; learning Tibetan Thangka painting; teaching English to newly arrived refugees; jewelry design and creation; or volunteering at a children's school. Conducting research with refugees or other segments of the population is another ISP option to pursue. We'll also begin our study of Hindi Language.

After concluding our stay among the foothills and mountains of northern India, we will travel south and west to the Rajasthan desert. We'll live with families for our time in Jaipur while meeting with local scholars and NGO leaders attempting to understand how a smaller-sized Indian city functions day-to-day. Spending time in Jai Singh's beautifully planned Pink City, we'll explore arts and crafts traditions, ancient

Hindu goddess worship, cultural preservation, and modernity. As our program in Jaipur is closely connected with the Jain community, we'll be able to observe different types of meditation and yoga practiced by this community and, if our karma permits, we'll have an audience with His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya. We'll inquire about how religion sustains one's daily life and what histories intersect these traditions which claim to have been influencing human life since Vedic times.

Here in Jaipur, you may continue to study yoga or *tabla*; participate in a short internship at a local NGO working on women's issues, environmental conservation, or education reform; take formal classes in traditional Indian dance, *Katak*, which brings to life the epic tales of the Hindu tradition in a way one might never have imagined; or continue the study of Hindi language.

If time permits, we will continue our journey in Varanasi where we will explore the earthly abode of Lord Shiva and the most sacred Hindu city in the world. Here we will have the opportunity to learn about life on the Ganges Plain: to live with Hindu families; to learn and practice conversational Hindi language; and to meet with social and religious leaders in the community who will help us understand issues such as the caste system, Muslim/Hindu relations, traditional Ayurvedic medicine, and religious art and ritual from Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions. We will admire and appreciate temple and mosque architecture, walk along the *ghats* to witness the intense activity along the riverbanks, and enjoy boat rides on the Ganges. On the banks of the river, students will observe a variety of religious practices where people perform daily rituals.

If we are able to travel to Banaras, ISP opportunities could include working with children at a street children's shelter and school, taking yoga or traditional dance instruction, receiving lessons in the classical music traditions, researching religious practices in the city, or studying intensive Hindi language.

Before leaving Varanasi, we will make a day trip to Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first sermon on the Four Noble Truths. Then we will retrace his footsteps and travel to Bodh Gaya, where he is believed to have attained enlightenment by meditating under a bodhi tree more than 2,500 years ago. We will visit the Mahabodhi temple and several other temples and monasteries in Bodh Gaya. We then begin to make our way back to Delhi, but en route, we'll visit the ancient abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri then stop in Agra to experience one of the world's most famous architectural achievements—the resplendent Taj Mahal.



The final days of the program will be coordinated by the participants—selecting the destination, determining the itinerary, and realizing the experience—essentially leading the group to a destination of your choice. This opportunity is invaluable in terms of leadership development, budget management, negotiating and planning for group travel, and bargaining for appropriate services along the way. The semester program is especially designed to offer opportunities for you to practice these skills in order to work as a team during this last week of the program.

Depending on whether you are traveling during the fall or the spring semester, previous groups have chosen various venues for their student-led portion: remaining in Ladakh exploring Tibetan refugee camps on the Chang Thang plateau near Tso Moriri; traveling over the highest motorable mountain pass in the world—the Khardung La—into the Nubra Valley to explore monasteries and the famous herd of bactarian (two-humped) camels that reside in the sand dunes there; and traveling further northwest, intersecting with the unique, isolated culture of Dards—practitioners of Bon religion who resisted conversion by Muslims during insurgence. Some groups have also elected to visit (or re-visit) the holy Hindu city of Varanasi for five days to a week.

The Global LAB India semester concludes with a couple of free days in New Delhi and a farewell banquet before we board the plane to return home to the United States.

***Note on the fall and the spring itineraries:*** *Our itineraries follow the climates: In the fall term: the program will begin in Ladakh and then continue in Dharamsala, Jaipur, and—if the students decide and time permits—Varanasi, to avoid the cold weather of the Tibetan Plateau in the winter. In the spring term: the order of the program is reversed as we will begin in Jaipur, followed by Dharamsala then conclude in Ladakh to avoid the hot weather of the plains in late spring.*

### 2012 Program Dates

Spring Term: \*February 13 – May 12, 2012 (\*pre-travel orientation in US, February 13-15)

Fall Term: \*September 10 – December 8, 2012 (\*pre-travel orientation in US, September 10-12)

*Applications are accepted year-round on a rolling admissions basis (group size: 6-12 students).*

### 2012 Semester Program Tuition

\$10,595 (*not including r/t international airfare or travel to point of group departure—NYC or Washington, DC*). Tuition includes: pre-trip preparatory and educational materials and orientation; dedicated student web pages for program communications and resources; all logistical facilitation; all hotels and guest houses; all meals; all domestic air fares/taxis/buses/trains; museum, park and temple entrance fees; Global LAB faculty and instruction; local coordinators, cooks, porters; and all program elements (independent study projects and apprenticeships, community service projects, home-stays, and community support/charitable contributions). Global LAB is able to offer basic travel, medical, and emergency evacuation insurance coverage through its “Core Travel Program” (please contact our Director of Programs for details).

Please note: Additional expenses not covered by Global LAB include: inoculations, additions/upgrades to Global LAB’s basic “Core Travel Program” travel insurance and international medical and evacuation insurance; visa/passport processing fees; and personal costs (laundry, phone calls/emails, souvenirs, etc.).

## Cancellation/Refund Policy

While Global LAB would like to provide as much flexibility as possible, this policy is based on the timing of our commitments to instructors, international airfares and travel arrangements, confirmation of in-country program components, logistical administration, and student preparation. We recommend that participants purchase travel insurance to protect themselves against financial loss in the case of personal emergency or other unforeseen events requiring last minute cancellation.

## Program Deposit

A \$500 program deposit is due with student application. \$250 of the deposit is refundable up to 90 days prior to departure. If a participant withdraws his or her application within 90 days of program departure, the deposit is nonrefundable. The \$500 deposit is fully credited toward program tuition. If Global LAB does not accept a student's application, the full deposit is refunded less a \$75 processing fee.

## Tuition Balance

Tuition balance is due in full 60 days prior to program departure and is 50% refundable up to 30 days prior to departure. If cancellation occurs within 30 days of departure, 20% of tuition is refundable.



## How to Apply & Eligibility

Global LAB accepts applications on a rolling admissions basis, accepting qualified applicants until programs are full (maximum of 12 participants). For this reason, we recommend candidates submit their applications as early as possible. Semesters are open to those ages 16-22. No language prerequisite is required. While the semester is geared toward interim or 'gap' year students, high school seniors as well as college students will be considered.

## Credit

For high school seniors, Global LAB works closely with you and your school to ensure that you receive the fullest credit possible for participating. University students may also be eligible for credit. Contact our Director of Programs for the very latest credit information and guidance.



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*Global Learning Across Borders™, a non-profit 501(c)(3) based in New York, exists to educate and inspire new generations of young people and adults to become responsible and committed global citizens in their local communities and beyond. We do this through international cultural immersion and community service programs for young adults; global studies professional development programs for educators; partnering with schools to help design and launch experiential global education and service programs; and through global expeditions that offer exceptional cultural experiences for adults.*

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