

07/28/2023

Willow Hoins

Field Observation 3

Honors India Study Abroad

1. What have you observed,
2. What was your initial reaction to what you observed
3. What have you learned about what you observed to try to understand and contextualize it further
4. Any final insights or understandings

In the space of looming valleys and ephemeral mountains, whose grandeur seems to be never ending, Ladakh is very much a place of tucked away things. Part of that impression comes from the underground greenhouses & food storages, the homes buried in poplar and willow, and the sheer remoteness of the region— however, that remoteness *is* broken down by the mass of tourists— but the real culprit of this sensation is the culture. Each region shares differences in language, which maintain the nomadic origins and developments of their background. The Tibetan Buddhism practiced here links itself closely with the bone religions of older days. The shops are tucked away into alleys and cozy staircases, past ancient palace gates or perched above the main markets. But beyond that, each history, story, and feeling seems wholeheartedly underlying. The expert hockey leagues, the international polo tournament, and the seemingly constant hidden stories & enterprises & connections. Ecovillages, artificial glaciers, localization movements, Malta-inspired gallarija, the growlers flying overhead... everything contributes to this beauty of tucked away things. Part of that notion comes from the history, and what was essentially isolation up until as late as the 1970s, and still even in some of the more remote areas here today. Regardless, Ladakh is a place where rich histories, tourism, climate change, and unique experiences merge readily. In fact, the engagement in tourism, eco-tourism namely, is to a level entirely unfamiliar from our experiences back in Bangalore. The economy has tailored itself to all walks of life: from the old Ladakhi women in their *kuntop* or *sulma*, to the migrated Delhi shop keepers, to the Tibetan refugees, to the 20 something hikers or the 30 something mountain bikers or the 70 something ever-returning and ever-infatuated tourists, and more. I think in a place of so much culmination, looking to the little histories— the stories from our fellows' aunts, cousins, and grandparents— are where I find the most rewarding insights. Otherwise, you might get lost or swept up in the never-ending tucked away things, too.