

# Spiti

A UNIQUE WONDERLAND

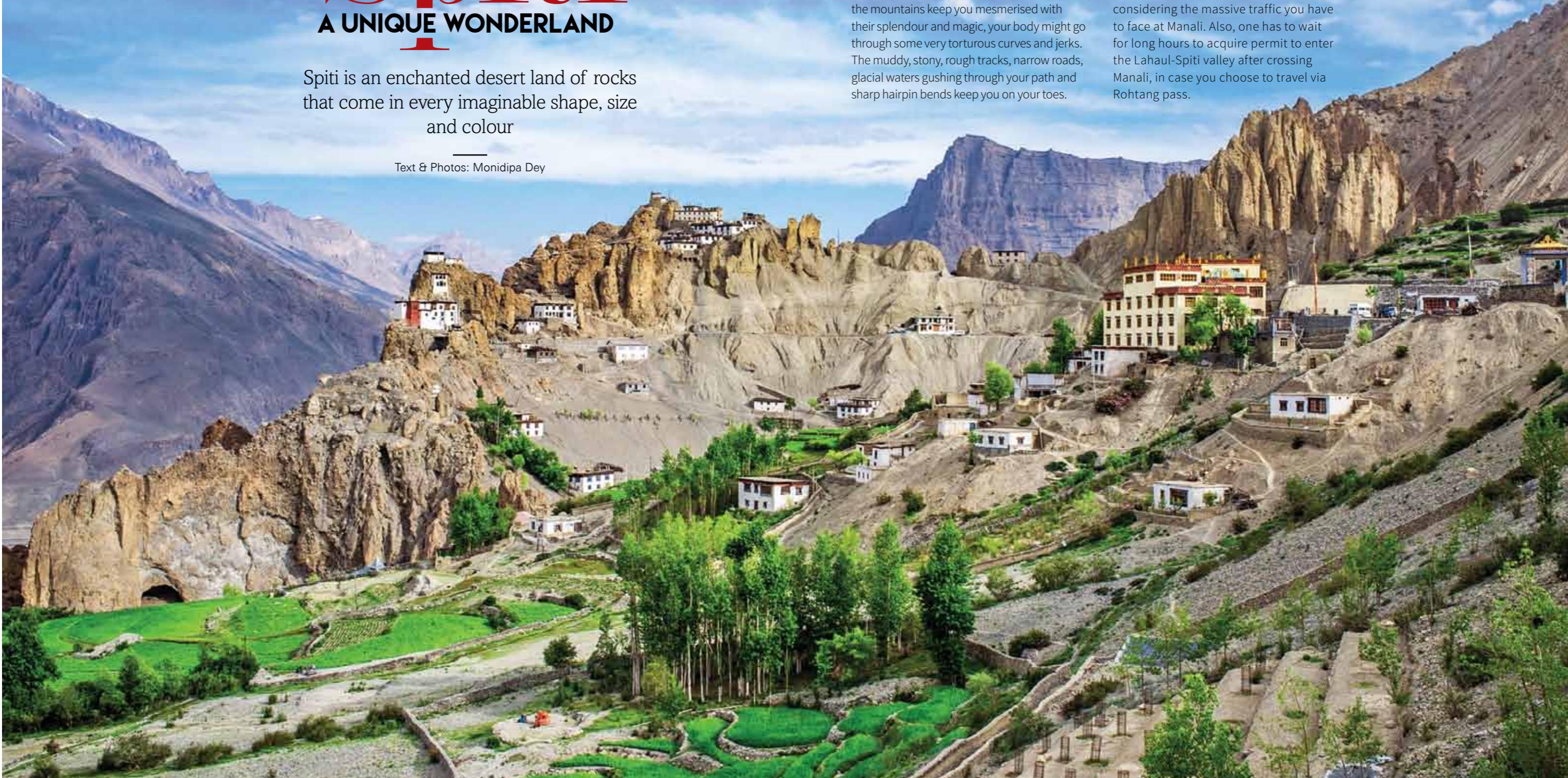
Spiti is an enchanted desert land of rocks that come in every imaginable shape, size and colour

Text & Photos: Monidipa Dey

To find the real soul of the Himalayas and to feel its true essence, one must go exploring deep in the mountains. The Spiti Valley is one such place, but be prepared for a very rough ride ahead. The roads in Spiti are considered among the most dangerous roads in the world. So while the mountains keep you mesmerised with their splendour and magic, your body might go through some very torturous curves and jerks. The muddy, stony, rough tracks, narrow roads, glacial waters gushing through your path and sharp hairpin bends keep you on your toes.

## BEST ROUTE TO SPITI

There are two ways to reach Spiti valley; one via Manali and Rohtang pass and the other via Kullu, Aut and Jalori pass. If you haven't witnessed the beauty of Kinnaur region, you should opt for the Jalori pass route. It is a better option considering the massive traffic you have to face at Manali. Also, one has to wait for long hours to acquire permit to enter the Lahaul-Spiti valley after crossing Manali, in case you choose to travel via Rohtang pass.





(Above) In the land of clouds – Jibhi; (Right) On way to Chitkul, at Rakchamm, pink fields of buckwheat



#### HALT AT SANGLA

Jalori pass is 112 km away from Manali and takes about 4-5 hours to reach. Start early so that you can reach before lunch. If you have enough time on hand, make a night halt at Jibhi, a pretty Himalayan hamlet where you can explore the forests that surround it. Next stop is Sangla which is almost 210 km away from Jibhi and it takes almost 10-12 hours to reach Sangla. The route to Sangla, once you reach Rampur-Bushahr, turns scenic and once in Kinnaur it is cooler and prettier.

#### THE BEAUTY OF CHITKUL

The road to Chitkul from Sangla is rough, but the surrounding scenic beauty keeps you enthralled. You will see rivers, bright pink fields of buckwheat, bugyals full of green grass, mountain streams, snow peaks and ever changing shapes of mountains. Sangla to Chitkul is around 55 km and takes around an hour to reach. After spending few hours exploring the place, you can come back to Sangla and after a short rest, spend rest of the day exploring this town and the villages around it. You can also opt for walking trails popular in this place.

#### QUICK FACTS

Drinking water or any fluids at regular intervals is a must to avoid dehydration as Spiti valley is a dry area.

As you will move through very high altitudes, spending a day at **Manali or Kullu** at the start of your journey will help you acclimatise.

## The scenery of Kinnaur region will mesmerise you as you pass Recong peo, Pooh and Khaab

#### CHANGING LANDSCAPES

On the road to Spiti, your first halt can be either Nako or Tabo. Sangla to Tabo is 190 km and the road is treacherous. It takes almost an entire day to reach Tabo. You will leave behind the Baspa river that was by your side until now at Karcham. From here river Sutlej will give you company. The scenery of Kinnaur region will mesmerise you as you pass Recong peo, Pooh and Khaab. There will be a gradual change in the landscape as you inch towards the Spiti valley with mountains losing their green cover and turning barren with rocky faces. The Lahaul-Spiti valley begins after crossing Namgia and this is the place where Sutlej meets the river Spiti. You enter an enchanted desert land of rocks that come in every imaginable shape, size and colour. After entering Lahaul-Spiti, in Sumdo

Mountains of Spiti tell a tale of hog-back Mountains and gully erosion, due to constant water and wind erosion for millions of years



it is compulsory to report at the ITBP check-post to seek permission for entering the valley. From Sumdo, before reaching Hoorling, you can take a detour and follow a rather lonely and beautiful road that leads you to the Gue village and monastery, which is located close to the Tibet border. The monastery is famed for holding India's only known natural mummy, the desiccated body of a monk that is around 550 years old. From Gue, follow the same path back to the main road, and continue up to Tabo.

a monastery perched on a high cliff top, and a large village built on a bluff that opens out into the main valley, ending in a sharp cliff. The view from top is indeed breathtaking. From Dhankar, Kaza is around an hour away. It is a rather pretty but congested town on the banks of the Spiti river, and a place full of tourists. Next day you can follow the curving roads that take you uphill to the beautiful villages such as Langza, Komic, Hikkim, Kee, etc., located at high altitudes.

#### A BEAUTIFUL DETOUR

You can take a detour to visit the enchanting Chandratal lake, situated at almost 13,500 ft. After Kunzum pass if you take the bifurcation from Batal you will land up at the camping site near Chandratal. The blue lake is moon-shaped and there are many other small water bodies near it. View the lake in the early morning light and experience the tranquility of the place.

#### BACK TO MANALI

While coming back towards Manali take the road that passes through Batal and Chatru. The road is covered by stones, mud and with glacial rivers flowing freely across the mud tracks. It is advisable to start early from Chandratal to avoid the melting snow waters that gush down heavily in the later part of the day. Once in the Rohtang pass area, you will notice the change in scenario with greenery back in sight. ☺