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**CORRIGENDUM**

In the January issue, Hotsheet Section (pg 8), the price of the Macallan No 6 was incorrectly mentioned as Rs 8,500. The correct price is Rs 8.5 lakh for 750 ml (in Delhi). The error is regretted.

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

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# Leh's Best Kept Secret

CULTURE  
HISTORY | MUSEUM

The mountain hideout's Central Asian Museum lovingly restores vignettes of history that promise a tourist the vision of a traveller.

By **BANDEEP SINGH**

The traveller gazing at the sweeping vistas of Ladakh often misses the perspective of the region as an important trading outpost of the silk route. The region's cultural significance as a melting pot of Central Asian cultural influences has been eclipsed by the political and religious ferment of state of Jammu & Kashmir, of which Ladakh was a part.

The imperative to showcase the true Central Asian cultural heritage of Ladakh germinated the idea of creating a museum. Nested in the courtyard of Leh's oldest masjid, Tsas Soma Zangsti, the Central Asian Museum is Leh's best kept secret . A tall stone and wood tower—modelled on the Tibetan-Ladakhi fort architecture by German architect Andre Alexander—houses a motley collection of artifacts, ornate vessels, manuscripts and old photographs that coalesce to give a glimpse of the cultural history of Ladakh.

## The Past is Omnipresent

You enter through a large hall filled with artifacts and Ladakhi antiques. Surrounding it is a corridor displaying old photographs of trade caravans and life in the region dating back to a hundred years ago. A winding staircase leads to the two floors of the museum, housing dedicated collections of Central Asian and Tibetan artifacts, hand-embroidered carpets, jewellery and various other collectibles. The top floor houses a collection of rare manuscripts and scriptures including a hand-calligraphed Quran. An open corridor offers a panoramic view of the Leh Fort and the old quarters of the town. The staircase exits on a wooden moat bridge that opens into a courtyard of willow trees, dotted with wooden tables, where a Museum café serves traditional Ladakhi fare.

The experience of the Museum—a must do—especially on the first day of acclimatising when you land in Leh provides a rich cultural filter to see and explore the region. When you look out of the window in Nubra Valley next, perhaps you will have a vision of the Silk road.

\*

**HISTORY BECKONS**  
The rear elevation of the Central Asian Museum (opposite page); A Ladakhi Kitchen with the traditional stove and utensils on display at the Central Asian Museum (above); Copper spoons and 19th century animal fur pouches (top).

CULTURE  
HISTORY | MUSEUM

**TIMELESS BEAUTY**  
The traditional Tibetan calendar called Logur has hieroglyph characters etched into the surface of a wooden plank (right)

**FOUNTAINHEAD**  
Gulam Mustafa, 63, is the museum's curator, photographed in the Central Asian Section of the Museum. A hotelier by profession, he has procured and collected most of the artifacts displayed in the museum. (below)



**RITE OF PASSAGE**  
A hundred-year-old photograph of a trading caravan crossing a snow-covered pass in Ladakh (above); A boxed set of a Mughal hand-calligraphed Quran from the 16th century (left)