Himalayan Buddhist Art and Architecture Seminar

ASIA 3000 (8 Credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
India: Himalayan Buddhist Art and Architecture

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description
The Himalayan Buddhist Art and Architecture Seminar is a broad survey course offering an extensive introduction to Himalayan Buddhist arts and architecture. The course will investigate various aspects of the religion, art, architecture, politics, ancient and modern history of the region. Issues such as Himalayan Buddhist culture and its integration into the larger context of contemporary Indian national identity will also be studied. Seminar activities include formal and informal lectures, discussions, and site visits. Integrating different types of learning, such as conventional classroom lectures, supplementary readings, "non-academic" presentations, self-motivated investigations, and varied cultural experiences will be challenging. It may also be challenging to appreciate the varied presentation styles of some of our local resource persons, as Indian pedagogical styles differ markedly from American teaching methods.

This aspect of the course is a critical part of the cross-cultural experience; students will learn from different types of experts including scholars, monastics, and others. As a group and as individuals, we are obliged to reflect mindfully and critically upon the diverse information presented in the seminar.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of this course, students will be expected to:
- Demonstrate a basic understanding of Vajrayana Buddhism;
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of Buddhist art, its purpose and aesthetics;
- Articulate an understanding of the materials and techniques of Himalayan architecture;
- Understand the basic concepts of rasa, Indian aesthetic theory;
- Have studied the ideals of religious patronage and merit accrual;
- Articulate the challenges of conservation of art and architecture in the Himalayas;
- Be able to conduct basic field-work, including site surveys;
- Have read and discussed a primary "root text" of Buddhism, The eighth century Bodhicaryavatara, by Santideva;
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of "survival" Hindi, the national language of India.

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Language of Instruction
This course is taught entirely in English. Students are introduced to basic “survival” Hindi.

Course Requirements

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Course Modules

Himalayan Arts
This is an interdisciplinary course focusing on religion, arts, architecture, and culture of the Indian Himalayas. Most lectures will take place while visiting sites of art historical significance. We will study traditional and contemporary issues in Himalayan art history, including Vajrayana Buddhism, conservation of threatened structures, and cultural stresses such as tourism and environmental degradation.

Himalayan Culture and Society
We will study the ancient and modern history of the region, social and political issues, the geographical peculiarities of the Himalayas, and issues such as Himalayan Buddhist culture as well as its integration into the larger Indian context. Himalayan Buddhism’s visual culture is threatened by both the introduction of modern values and changes in climate. The loss of many historically significant monasteries is a sad certainty, unless conservation measures are quickly implemented. Art historical conservation and restoration are therefore also important topics. The course will also provide a forum for discussion and study of high altitude flora and fauna, Himalayan geography and the issues of eco-tourism, climate change, deforestation, and water conservation.

Field Study Methods
The course will teach site research protocols and field methodology. Archival research is essential in the study of art history and religion, but a well-grounded field methodology is essential for the scholar to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of these monuments in the context of still living cultural traditions. Students will develop skills in observation and documentation, gathering and organizing research materials, and maintaining a work journal.

Hindi
The course will introduce students to basic “survival” Hindi, the national language of India, and a culturally unifying element of the nation state.

Important Site Visits
Sarahan Bhimakali Temple
Nako Monastery
Tabo Monastery
Lalung Monastery
Tsokar Himalayan Wildlife Refuge
Hemis Monastery
Tikse Monastery
Basgo Monastery
Chemde Monastery

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Lecture Series Topics

**Place**          **Lecture**
New Delhi          Assessing and Understanding the “Other”
Mussoorie          *Rasa*: the Aesthetic Theory of India Art and Connoisseurship
Mussoorie          Introduction to Buddhism
Sarahan            Hindu-Buddhist Syncretism of the Himalayas
Sangla Valley      Geography of the Himalayas
Nako Monastery     Meaning of the Mandala and Stupa
Tabo Monastery     Understanding Buddhist iconography as a Pilgrimage Path
Tabo Monastery     Site Plans and Field Notes
Lalung Monastery   The Place of the Goddess in Buddhism
Keylong            The Movement of Religion and Art along the Silk Road
Sarchu/Tsokar      Wildlife of the Himalayas
Leh                Tourism and Buddhism: The Shangri-la Syndrome
Leh at CIBS        Distinctive Aspects of Ladakhi Buddhism
Leh at CIBS        Comparison of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism
Leh                Ethics of Field Work
Basgo Monastery    Restoration/Conservation Challenges in the Himalayas
Alchi              The Arts of Kashmiri Buddhism
Sumda Chun         Site Survey of monastery architecture, sculpture and conservation status

In addition to the above lectures students will read the *Bodhicaryavatara* by Shantideva and participate in “survival” Hindi classes.

*Excursions, lectures, and readings are subject to change, addition, and modification.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

**Description of Assignments:**

**Pre-Departure Book Response Essays** 10%
Two 3-page pre-departure response essays based on a choice of assigned books

**Buddhist Deity/Historical Figure Oral Presentations (two)** 10%
These are two 5-minute oral presentations of assigned Buddhist deities or important historical figures, to be presented in Sarchu and Keylong.

**“Wheel of Existence” Essay** 10%
Three-page “Wheel of Existence” essay to be submitted in Leh

**Final Research Paper and/or Site Survey** 20%
Final Paper: approximately 12 pages of written content. It should be footnoted where appropriate and include a full bibliography. If illustrations are necessary for clarity, they must be

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included with full citation. Students may choose to research an appropriate topic relevant to
course content or to participate in a group site survey of Sumda Chun monastery and to write
up findings.

**Oral Presentation of Research** 20%
This is a fifteen-minute oral presentation of research findings either from independent research
on an appropriate course-related topic or participation on the site survey at Sumda Chen.

**Final Essay Exam** 20%

**Participation** 10%
The depth and quality of students' participation in all aspects of the course is considered for evaluation,
including: participation in synthesis discussion (silence will not be considered evidence of wisdom),
conscientious and courteous presence at all lectures and excursions, and Hindi classes.

**Assessment**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in All Seminar Activities, including Hindi language classes</td>
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**Grading Scale**

- 94-100% A
- 90-93% A-
- 87-89% B+
- 84-86% B
- 80-83% B-
- 77-79% C+
- 74-76% C
- 70-73% C-
- 67-69% D+
- 64-66% D
- below 64 F

**Expectations and Policies**
All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Spelling and grammar are part of grading criteria;
careful proofreading and editing are essential parts of the writing process. I will be happy to read a
rough draft of any assignment at least two days prior to the due date. Please note: description is not
analysis. While there is a place for description of people, events or organizations in your assignments, be
aware that extensive description is not a substitute for critical analysis based on independent thinking
and understanding. The more your writings reflect synthesis of theory observation and reflection, the
more successful your work will be.

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If documentation of a medical emergency is produced, extensions for meetings and written work may be negotiated. If make-ups granted due to illness are not completed within the agreed upon time, a grade of zero will be recorded for that assignment. Unexcused late assignments will not be accepted.

**Show up prepared.** Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

**Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done according to the specified requirements.** This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

**Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer.** These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak, please acknowledge this with your polite behavior.

**Comply with academic integrity policies** (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

**Respect differences of opinion** (classmates’, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

**Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.