

L-G VK Saxena inaugurates Ladakh Festival 2026 at Polo Ground, Leh

Three-day festival showcases Ladakh's rich cultural heritage, traditional sports, local cuisine, handicrafts and emerging tourism experiences

Leh, September 27: Lieutenant Governor, Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena, yesterday inaugurated the Ladakh Festival 2026 at the Polo Ground, Leh, in the presence of a large number of spectators, marking the beginning of a three-day celebration of Ladakh's rich cultural heritage, traditional lifestyle, art, cuisine, sports and diverse tourism experiences.

The Ladakh Festival, one of the region's significant cultural and tourism events, celebrates the living heritage, cultural identity and collective spirit of the people of Ladakh. Over the years, the Festival has evolved into an important platform for showcasing Ladakh's unique traditions, landscapes, hospitality and diverse tourism potential to audiences from across India and the world.

The Festival also assumes significance from the tourism perspective as Ladakh continues to strengthen its position on the national and international tourism map. As of September 16, 2026, Ladakh had received 4.37 lakh tourists, a number already higher than the total tourist arrivals recorded during the entire year of 2025.

The three-day Ladakh Festival 2026 brings together a wide range of activities showcasing the diversity of Ladakh's cultural and tourism ecosystem.

The Festival features handicraft and handloom exhibitions, local cuisine, live demonstrations, photo exhibitions, traditional archery, astronomy and star-gazing activities, mask dances, short-film screenings, river rafting, polo matches and a sound-and-light show, offering visitors a blend of traditional experiences and contemporary attractions.

Traditional sports such as archery and horse polo, local cuisine, exhibition of the craftsmanship of local artisans through handicraft and handloom exhibitions and live demonstrations, astronomy and star-gazing activities, river rafting, short films, and sound-and-light show are the major attractions of the three-day Festival aimed at expanding the Festival's appeal, bringing together culture, adventure, creativity and new forms of visitor engagement.

Speaking on the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor said that the Ladakh Festival is an important platform for preserving Ladakh's centuries-old traditions and presenting its rich cultural heritage on the national and international stage. He emphasised that as Ladakh moves forward on the path of development and modernisation, preserving its deep cultural roots becomes even more important. He said the Ladakh Festival represents a collective effort to safeguard this heritage while presenting it to the world with pride.

The Lieutenant Governor stressed that the objective of tourism development is not merely to increase visitor numbers, but to promote sustainable, community-led and environmentally responsible tourism that creates equitable economic opportunities for local communities while protecting Ladakh's fragile ecology and cultural heritage.

He said festivals such as the Ladakh Festival provide visitors an opportunity to experience Ladakh beyond its breathtaking landscapes—to understand its people, traditions, culture and way of life. Such events also help create opportunities for local artisans, entrepreneurs, artists, performers and tourism stakeholders.

The Lieutenant Governor said Ladakh is working towards becoming a true all-season tourism destination, with focus on winter tourism, astro tourism, wellness tourism, culture-based tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism and village tourism.

The Lieutenant Governor said the Ladakh Festival provides an important opportunity to take the region's cultural identity beyond its geographical boundaries. He described such cultural exchange as an important strength of tourism and a means of ensuring that Ladakh's heritage is passed on to future generations. The Lieutenant Governor called upon visitors to experience Ladakh responsibly, engage with local communities, understand its traditions, support local artisans and entrepreneurs, and help protect the region's fragile environment.

The Lieutenant Governor expressed confidence that the Festival would serve not only as a celebration of Ladakh's rich heritage but also as a platform for strengthening tourism, supporting local livelihoods, promoting cultural exchange and taking Ladakh's unique identity to the national and international stage.

The opening day featured performances by the Stringmo Sisters and the Shillong Chamber Choir, along with a range of folk and cultural performances representing Ladakh's vibrant artistic traditions.

Earlier, a grand cultural parade featuring monastic groups, folk troupes, traditional musicians, horse and camel riders, and representatives from different villages and districts took place from Karzoo and culminated at Polo Ground.



