

Week-long Ladakh Astro Festival 2026 Begins in Leh

Leh, May 20: The week-long Ladakh Astro Festival 2026 commenced today at the Tourism Department Compound, Leh, with enthusiastic participation from students, astronomy enthusiasts, officials and guests from across the region.

The inaugural function was graced by Shri Mukesh Singh (IPS), Director General of Police, Union Territory of Ladakh, as the Chief Guest. The Guest of Honour for the occasion was Prof. Annapurni Subramaniam, Director of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru.

Welcoming the gathering, Shri Tsering Palden (JKAS), Director Tourism, Ladakh, highlighted the growing importance of astro-tourism in the region. He informed that the dates for the Astro Festival have been fixed for the next three years to strengthen Ladakh's tourism calendar and promote the region as a premier astro-tourism destination. He added that extensive publicity has already been carried out following the announcement of the festival dates by the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of UT Ladakh. He expressed hope that Ladakh would emerge as a global hub for astro-tourism in the coming years.

Prof. Annapurni Subramaniam delivered a detailed presentation on the history and contributions of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics. She also explained why Hanle is considered one of the best locations in the world for astronomical observations and elaborated on the advanced equipment and facilities installed at the Hanle Observatory.

Addressing the gathering, Shri Mukesh Singh congratulated the organisers for hosting the festival and stated that such initiatives provide an excellent platform to showcase the wonders of the universe while simultaneously promoting tourism in Ladakh. He remarked that astro-tourism has the potential to become a unique identity and trademark for the region.

The Vote of Thanks was delivered by AD Tourism, Padma Angmo (JKAS).

During the inaugural event, Shri Baseer Ul Haq Choudhary, IAS, Administrative Secretary, Public Works (R&B), Hospitality and Protocol, Estates, and Information & Public Relations Departments, UT Ladakh, and Sh. Nitish Rajora, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, Nyoma, along with other officials, were also present.

Following the inaugural session, an expert talk was conducted by Prof. Biman Nath from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Mohali, on the topic "Animal Astronomers: How Animals See Stars." During his engaging session, he explained how animals navigate using stars, the relationship between migratory birds and celestial navigation, luminosity, and how various species are naturally adapted to observe the night sky. He also spoke about ancient sciences, the issue of light pollution, and the importance of preserving dark skies for ecological balance. The session concluded with an interactive discussion with participants.

The inaugural day of the festival also featured interactive stalls, solar viewing sessions, an astro photography gallery, and a night sky watch activity, attracting significant interest from visitors and participants.



