

Snow Leopard Expedition Ladakh 2020 & 2021 – 15 days

This is a very special wild life tour, taking you into the remote, high valleys of Ladakh in the winter. Thanks to our cooperation with snow leopard specialists in the area, as well as experienced snow leopard trackers, we are able to offer you a fairly good chance of seeing one of the most elusive creatures on earth. Moreover, experiencing this enclave of Tibetan culture in the winter is a unique experience. Though the trekking is not very hard as such, obviously this is not a tour for people who chill easily.



This tour can be done individually (2 persons minimum is advised) or as a group tour.

Fixed departure date for the group tour:

Dec 09 - 24, 2020.

Februari 8 - 22, 2021.

Itinerary

Day 01: Flight Delhi - Leh

Early morning flight from Delhi to Leh. The short flight (about one hour) generally offers spectacular views of the snow-clad Himalayas. On a clear day the Karakoram can be viewed as well.

After reaching Leh you are transferred to the guesthouse, which is a family-run charming place just outside Leh. Rest of the day at leisure. It is advisable to take at least one full days of rest, in order to allow the body to get used to the altitude. Afternoon can best spent either at the guesthouse or in downtown Leh (transport available).

Day 02: Leh

Day spent in and around Leh. As it is still wise to avoid exertion, we shall only make short walks in and around Leh. You will get our first taste of the colourful and fascinating Tibetan Buddhism on a visit to the small but picturesque *gompa* (monastery) of Sankar. At the office of the Snow Leopard Conservancy, an NGO dedicated to the study and protection of the snow leopard, we'll be briefed on the status and life history of the Ladakhi snow leopards.

Dinner and overnight at the guesthouse.

Day 03: Leh & Indus Valley

Most of the day we'll be touring the Indus Valley visiting a number of Buddhist monasteries, while enjoying the wintry Himalayan landscape.

Dinner and overnight at the guesthouse.

Day 04 - 13: Snow leopard safari

After breakfast cars will take us to the beginning of our trek. There porters will be waiting. After arranging our luggage we'll start off into the mountains, climbing steadily along isolated hamlets into a wintry wonder world. Just experiencing this is worth the whole trip!

Ten days we'll be exploring the high, remote valleys where snow leopards live. Sometimes we'll be staying at home stays – very simple local houses – but most of the time we'll be camping. Every two or three days we shift camp to another location, from where we will access vantage points that give us a good chance of glimpsing the *shan*, as the Ladakhi call it. Tracks, scats and scratch marks will tell us whether we are on the right track.

We work with specially trained snow leopard trackers, people who live in the area and who know the snow leopard's behavior well.

As the snow leopards are an endangered species, the last thing we want is to disturb the animals and thereby affect their survival chances. We take utmost caution to prevent this. Whenever we get the chance to see one of these majestic animals it will be up to them to decide at what distance this will happen, there will be no chasing. Unfortunately these things do happen on tours organized by others. For this reason the exact route of the trek will not be disclosed.

Accommodation will be in home stays and tents. The main reason for not staying at home stays all the time is that by camping we are able to access higher places that are more close to the snow leopard areas. This saves us long, tiring walks everyday and ensures that we have more time to look for snow leopards, and therefore more chance to see one.

On our explorations we pass little Ladakhi villages where time, especially in winter, seems to almost stand still. These picturesque little frozen Shangrilas with their warm-hearted inhabitants are bound to leave an un-erasable impression on you. You'll get more than a taste of traditional Ladakhi village life, which includes regular consumption of *solja*, salty butter tea. Maybe not everyone's cup of tea, but very functional: it warms you up and gives you energy to burn.

But don't worry: we'll have our own cook along. He'll prepare a



tasty mix of Indian and western food that will really be something to look forward to at the end of a long day in the snow. Also, hot lunches will be served in the field.

Day 14: Leh

A full day in Leh to enjoy the comforts of a guesthouse, buy souvenirs or make excursion by jeep or on foot at your own initiative.

Please note: if the dates coincide you will be able to visit a Buddhist monastery *festival*. On the tour with departure on Feb. 8 you can witness the Matho Festival on day 14 of the tour. These festivals are known for their so-called *cham* dances. Monks dressed up as demons, gods and mythical figures - notably Guru Rimpoche, the great apostle that spread Mahayana Buddhism through the Himalayas in the eight century – perform intriguing dances at the slow beat of big drums. These festivals are typically held in the winter, and though they are purely religious by nature, they are happy, almost village fair-like gatherings. For the locals it is something to look forward too during the long, monotonous winter days. Dinner and overnight at the guesthouse.

Day 15: Flight Leh – Delhi

After breakfast transfer to the airport to board the flight to Delhi, where the tour ends.

Tour Price

Group tour

INR 227.250 pp (€ 2675, \$ 2970)

No. of participants 6 – 10.

Individual tours

2 - 5 pers. INR 194.250 (€ 2285), \$ 2540) pp.

6-10 pers. INR 189.250 (€ 2225), \$ 2470) pp.

Single supplement INR 38.250 (€ 450), \$ 500) pp.

Tour prices are on current rates only. Tour price may rise in case of air ticket price hike.

Price includes: transfer from Delhi Int. Airport to Guesthouse on day 1 and return to airport next day, one night at guesthouse in Delhi (breakfast only), flights Delhi – Leh and Leh – Delhi, all transfers in Ladakh, all accommodation in Ladakh (twin sharing at guesthouse, home stay and in tent), all meals (day 01 lunch till day 15 breakfast), English speaking local escort throughout (snow leopard expert), fuel and driver allowance, entry fee at Hemis High Altitude N.P., drop to hotel on day 15 (if required)

Price excludes: international air fare, sleeping bag and warm outdoor clothes, tips, laundry, alcohol, insurance and any other expenses of personal nature.

Group tours

There will be one group tour in December 2020 and two in 2021 (March and December). Tour leader will be Jan Knaapen, biologist, old-time 'hunter' for snow leopards and Himalaya specialist. Exact dates will be fixed soon. Please ask for the price.

On the tour in March 2021 we will be fortunate enough to witness a so-called *tsechu* or mask dance festival at Stok on March 6 and 7, near Leh.

Extension of program

It is very well possible to extend your stay in Ladakh with a number of days. Also, if you want to do sight seeing in Delhi we can arrange that. Apart from regular car-based sight seeings we can also arrange bicycle tours through Old Delhi, a delightful and safe way to explore the buzzing maze of alleys of this ancient place. Trips further afield, for instance to Jaipur or Agra, site of the famous Taj Mahal, can be arranged as well. Please contact us for more information.