

Old Caravan Roads Revisited – 17 days/9 days trek

Leh to Shyok and Nubra Valley

Tour JTT-LA-T01: Leh – Diggar – Shyok – Deskit - Leh

In the old days, seven caravan routes converged at Leh, the capital of Ladakh. The most profitable one connected Kullu Valley (present day- Himachal Pradesh) with Yarkand in Turkmenistan. Along this trail, the highly valued Kullu-opium was taken to China. We intend to revive it with our own modest caravan, trekking into the hidden valleys of Nubra and Shyok. Along a unique route, we descend to the Shyok River. Here, at the foot of the Karakoram, we stay for a few days in our own very comfortable community-based lodge in a traditional village. After exploring the area and visiting the legendary Pangong Lake (only 2 hours away from Shyok), we follow the Shyok River down all the way to the Pakistani border, and then return to Leh.

Itinerary

Day 01: Arrival at Leh

Whether you arrive by road over one of the two Himalayan crossings that give access to Ladakh (highly recommended) or by flight, you'll be received at the bus, taxi or the airport by our representative and escorted to your guesthouse or hotel. We have four options for your stay in Leh: guesthouse in the city, hotel in the city, and guesthouse or hotel in the rural area of Sankar just outside Leh.



Day 02 & 03: At Leh

If you have arrived by flight two nights in Leh is the absolute minimum to get acclimatised to the altitude, but as you will be going to even higher altitudes we take three nights. On day two you are advised to take it easy, just wander the streets of Leh and soak up the pleasant atmosphere.

On day three we'll take you further down the Indus Valley, to see the magnificent gompas – Buddhist monasteries – of Lamayuru and Alchi. It is an utterly scenic drive that in its self is more than worth the trip.

Day 03 – 11 TREKKING from Leh to Shyok

On this trek, you'll start from Leh. After passing the village of Sabu, you'll embark on a few days of steep climbing, as the first obstacle on this route is the Ladakh Range that separates the Indus Valley from the Nubra and Shyok Valley. We take four days to reach the pass Diggar La (5400 m), including one day to allow our bodies to keep track of the rapid increase in altitude. From the Diggar La, you'll get magnificent views of the Indus Valley below and the jagged and colourful Zaskar Mountains behind it. Achieving this spectacular vantage point will have been well worth the strenuous climb.



After descending briefly, we leave the trail that continues to Nubra Valley and passing another pass, traversing high meadows where yaks and goats graze, we reach an isolated hamlet. Apart from the sweeping views towards the North, it is the village people and their timeless way of life that will captivate you. Their traditionally built houses of mud-bricks and poplar beams represent a time-proven lifestyle that foreigners rarely get to see as the trekking route we're taking is even more rarely done. As a result, you too can expect a healthy curiosity among the locals that may easily surpass yours. Another pass – this time an easy one - will reward us with some spectacular views of the oasis of Tangyar. Descending to this beautiful, well-maintained traditional village through irrigated fields, you can't help but marvel at the ingenuity and industriousness of the Ladakhis when it comes to irrigation. This area sees hardly any rainfall and all crops – predominantly barley and recently also mustard – have to be irrigated. It is good to realize that carelessly jumping over an irrigation channel and thereby causing it to leak may affect the yield.

After Tangyar, the climb begins again. We'll take two days to reach the 5440m Nebuk La. This pass is generally covered in snow till the end of July so the last part may be somewhat arduous. We'll descend through pastures where yaks, horses and goats graze, and make camp near the summer settlement of Rele.

The next day will be all downward. After further descending the slopes of the Nebuk La, we'll veer North and enter a beautiful narrow gorge. Traversing its steep walls high above the river we'll finally reach our destination: Shyok.





Day 12 and 13: At Shyok

The village of Shyok, though accessible by road, sees very little traffic movement, and that's mainly locally stationed army personnel. Here, amidst the waving, green barley fields and looking out on the easternmost part of the Karakoram Range, Shyok River Lodge will be your magical abode for two days.

On the first day, you'll be taken on village and nature walks in and around the village. You'll visit the small local gompa (monastery) and learn about the monks' way of life. The village is like a big connected family that will welcome you wholeheartedly, eager to show you their homes and their traditional lifestyle. If the time is right, you can see and partake in the sowing, ploughing or harvesting of the barley. But there's always the option of sneaking out and relaxing with a book in the hammock among the lodge's willow groves.

On the second day, jeeps will take us to the famous Pangong Lake. This enormous salty lake is only 2 hours drive from Shyok River Lodge. It straddles the border with Tibet (China) and has become famous in India because of the film "Three Idiots" that was partly shot here. The deep blue lake, situated at an altitude of 4400 m and set amidst barren, light-coloured mountains, is an impressive sight. Little imagination is needed to imagine the conditions here in winter, and one can only be in awe of the small community that lives here throughout the year. Lunch will be had at one of the better tented accommodations near the lake, or if you prefer, picnic-style at a scenic spot.



Day 14: Shyok – Hundar

After breakfast, you'll embark on a thrilling 125 km jeep drive following the untamed Shyok River, freely meandering until it merges with the Nubra River in Nubra Valley. Thanks to a new rough road, which has opened up very recently, there is no need to travel all the way back to Leh and then cross the time-consuming Khardong La in order to visit Nubra Valley. Instead, we follow the wide and wild valley of the Shyok, passing

small hamlets of Ladakhi farms, crossing small rivers and sand dunes that are reminiscent of the Taklamakan Desert on the other side of the Karakoram. This very scenic drive takes most of the day. Lunch will be had picnic style. Around evening time, you reach Hundar, a small village near Deskit, the capital of Nubra, where you'll check into a comfortable guesthouse.

Day 15: Hundar – Turtuk - Hundar

Today you'll be exploring the Nubra Valley. There are two beautiful gompa's to explore, as well as a traditional, well-kept Ladakhi mansion. You'll be taken on a ride through the dunes near Hundar on the back of Bactrians, two-humped camels that directly descend from animals that worked the caravan trails to Yarkand and Kashgar. Though right on the banks of the river, the landscape is a true desert here, and riding the camels, you may easily forget you're actually in between the Himalayas and the Karakoram! In the afternoon, you can follow a small mountain trail that climbs high above the Nubra river to a remote little gompa.



Alternatively, you can choose to ride your SUV all the way westward to Turtuk, near the border with Pakistan. The road follows the Nubra River down along picturesque villages hidden among lush green willow and apricot groves. As the altitude is lower here (approx. 3000 m), the growing season is longer than in Shyok, especially, fruit trees thrive well in the long, warm summers. The jeep drive is a scenic one, as the Nubra Valley occasionally narrows to a gorge between steep walls over which a precarious semblance of a road is cut. You'll notice the change in landscape and vegetation as you get lower, as well as the cultural changes. While in Deskit and Hundar, the people are predominantly Buddhist, here muslims are in majority. For this car trip we have to charge an additional INR 6.000 per car.

Day 16. Hundar – Khardong La - Leh

After breakfast, your jeep will take you back to Leh. The road leads over the Khardung La, at 5450 m, one of the highest motorable roads in the world. Again, the drive is spectacular, and especially the dramatic views over the oasis of Leh while descending from the pass won't be forgotten easily. After reaching Leh, you'll check in to your guesthouse or hotel.

Day 17. Departure

After breakfast, you'll leave Leh for your onward destination. If you're flying out of Leh you'll be transferred to the airport.

Prices

Individual, with local Ladakhi guide (English speaking):

2, 3 pers: INR 148.500 / Euro 1980 / USD 2250 per person .

4 - 6 pers.: INR 141.000 / Euro 1880 / USD 2135 per person.

Single Supplement: INR 49.000 / Euro 650 / USD 740 per person.

Price includes: Air fare Delhi - Leh and Leh – Delhi, all accommodation (twin sharing, 2 person tents), full board except in Leh (CP, breakfast only), all transport by SUV vehicles, English speaking Ladakhi guide throughout, entry fees and Restricted Area Permit fees; village visits.

Not included: Tips; alcoholic drinks; laundry service; telephone calls; travel/personal insurance; other expenses of personal nature.

Please ask for quotation for additional services.

Extension and prelude options

After reaching Leh at the end of the trip, you most likely don't want to take the first flight out. Ladakh is a magical place that definitely warrants more exploring. Alternatively, you can spend more time on *getting there*. If you have the time, we strongly advise you to travel to Ladakh by road. It is one of the most spectacular road trips in the world. Crossing the Himalayan Range, you'll witness an amazing transition from the green, Hindu-dominated southern slopes of the Himalayas to the barren, colorful mountains of Buddhist Ladakh. To check out this tour, please click on 'The Great Himalayan Crossing' on this page:

<http://www.jantreksandtravels.com/Ladakh-toursEN.html>