

# JAN Treks & Travels

Journeys into Adventure and Nature

## **The path of the yogi: Trekking, Yoga & Dalai Lama in Ladakh – 24 days/ 9 days trek**

Visit the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh, attend the Kalachakra meeting (with the Dalai Lama), trek to Nubra Valley along an old caravan road, learn & exercise yoga.

**Tour JTT-LA-TY01:** Leh – Diggar – Shyok – Deskit - Leh

Group tour

Dates: July 6 – 29, 2014



The combination of yoga and trekking can be an awesome experience. Both invigorate and bolster the body and mind like no other. Those who are into trekking know what a terrific refurbishing of body and mind trekking can be. Doing regular sports doesn't even come close to it. Though trekking seems to be mainly legwork, it's actually the whole life style of exploring and sleeping under the stars that is so rejuvenating. Yoga exercises, of course, address all body parts, many of them unused in daily life, which is accompanied by a form of concentration that purifies and reorganizes the mind. It is a meditative and – for most - spiritual experience as well. To make matters even more spectacular, we'll trek through some of world's highest mountains, along ancient caravan routes and amidst the unique 'Tibetan' culture of the Trans-Himalaya.

During this trip we will add more to spiritual aspect by attending the so-called Kalachakra, a twelve day event where the Dalai Lama teaches, gives blessings and initiates young monks into lamahood. Luckily, in 2014 this yearly event takes place in Ladakh, so we get the chance to attend.

Ladakh lies north of the Himalayan Range. Though it is part of the Tibetan Plateau it lies within India. There is no religious persecution here. 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 week in our own very comfortable community-based lodge in a traditional

village. We'll be practicing yoga daily, going out on walks and excursions further afield - such as visiting the legendary Pangong Lake (only 2 hours away from Shyok) - and generally enjoying the peaceful atmosphere of the remote mountain village. After this we'll return back to Leh by jeep along a seldom traveled road, following the Shyok River down to the idyllic Nubra Valley, home to Buddhist monasteries that cling to the mountains and lush green apricot orchards the way to the Pakistani border, and then return to Leh.

## ***Who is who?***

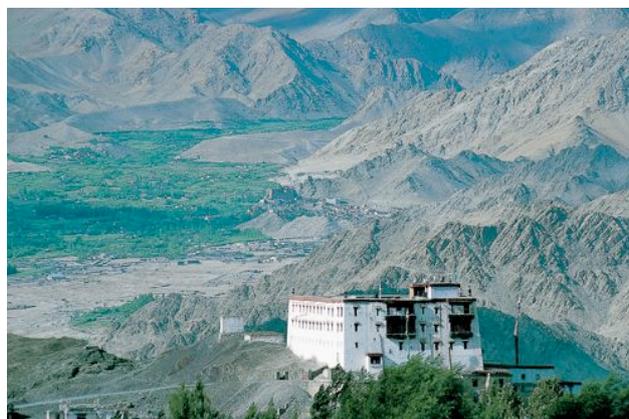
Sándor Temlock Casarin is an accomplished yogi and yoga teacher. Originally from the US, he spent many years in India, traveling its length and breadth on his motorcycle, teaching yoga wherever he went. Though presently based in the South-Swiss Alps, the travel bug will never leave him, and recently led him to Ladakh. That's where he met Jan and the idea for a unique cooperation emerged.

Jan Knaapen has traveled and lived in India, especially the Indian and Bhutanese Himalayas, since 1988, mainly on foot on horseback. After fifteen years of tour organizing and tour leading in the Himalayas, he took up travel writing and photography. He's written numerous articles on his adventurous and not so adventurous tours in India, and a book on trekking in Ladakh (in Dutch). Another ten years later, he's back as a travel designer and tour operator, still focusing on the most fascinating part of Asia: the Himalayas.

## ***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 - 04: At Leh, attending the Kalachakra**

During three days we'll be able to attend the most interesting part of the 12 day Kalachakra. On the first two days, July 7 and 8, His Holiness will give 'preliminary' teachings. On the third day, the Kalachakra Ritual Dance will be performed by the monks of Namgyal Monastery. You can attend the Kalachakra during all three days or spend some time on visiting the magnificent gompas – Buddhist monasteries – of the

Indus Valley, such as Hemis, Thikse, Lamayuru and Alchi. Our local staff will assist you in arranging your outings.



### **Day 05 - 13 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.

During the trek we will do light yoga exercises every day. In the morning we'll do a yoga warm-up mainly aimed at stretching before we start the walk, and after lunch there will be a short meditative session.

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.



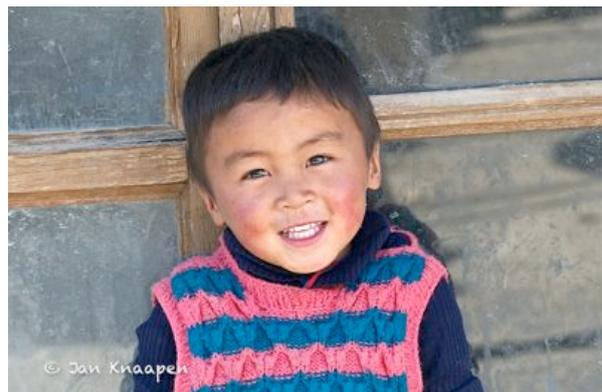
## Day 14 - 20: At Shyok

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 a week. Guided by the inspiring and accomplished yoga teacher

Sándor Temlock Casarin you can work on your *asanas* in daily sessions. The level and intensity is up to you. individual yoga sessions are available as well as group sessions. All levels of yoga experience will be accommodated. And you are always free to skip sessions if you want or to exchange your yoga mat for the hammock among the willow trees and a good book.

Apart from daily yoga sessions, you'll be taken on village and nature walks. You'll visit the small local gonpa (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.

We'll also take you on a day trip 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 phantasy 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 21: Shyok – Hundar**

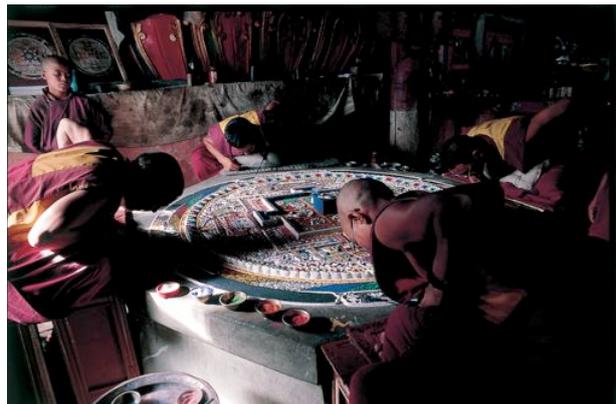
After a week of yoga, relaxing and immersing in the quiet mountain village atmosphere of Shyok, you'll embark on a thrilling 125 km jeep drive following the untamed Shyok River, freely meandering until it merges with the Nubra River in Nubra Valley. Thanks to a new rough road, opened up very recently, 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 22: Hundar – Turtuk - Hundar**

In the morning, you'll be taken westward, following 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. Today you have two options: you can ride the jeep to Turtuk, a small town not far from the Pakistani border, or do a camel safari and a walk.

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.

If you opt for the 'active' program, 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 gomba.



### **Day 23: 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 24: 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**

**Group tour**, with English & Dutch speaking tour guide and yoga teacher.

P.M.

*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 tour leader and yoga teacher throughout, as well as English speaking Ladakhi guide. Daily yoga exercises during the trek, one-week yoga course at Shyok River Lodge, Restricted Area Permit fees; village visits.

*Not included:* international flight, 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-tours.html>.