

# JAN Treks & Travels

Journeys into Adventure and Nature

## **Yoga & Trekking through Nomad Country – 28 days/12 days trek**

The raw and challenging Splendor of Changtang (Ladakh)

**Tour JTT-LA-TY02:** Leh – Tsomoriri – trekking to Pangong Tso – Shyok – Deskit - Leh

Group tour

Dates: August 10 – Sept. 5, 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. 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 be attending the so-called Kalachakra, a twelve day event where the Dalai Lama teachings, gives blessings and initiates young monks into lamahood. Luckily, this yearly event takes place in 2014 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. Though Ladakh's capital, Leh, and the nearby Indus Valley are getting more and more known for its beautiful gompas (Buddhist monasteries), the southeast of Ladakh is an area that relatively few visitors get to see. Here, the mountains are much less steep, jagged and folded than the ones in Zaskar, but just as high. The valleys are much higher - hardly anywhere below 4200 m - wide and desert-like. It is more of a high altitude plateau interspersed with colorful, snow-clad mountains and huge aquamarine lakes. It is part of the Tibetan Changtang area, with which it shares its inhabitants of nomads, called Changpa. Their yak, sheep and goats have to roam widely in order to find sufficient grass, whose owners have no

other option than to follow them, living year-round in yak-hair tents called rebus. We'll do the same, though our tents will be of the modern kind. Starting from the stunning Tsumoriri lake, we'll wander through this vast expanse, losing track of time and space till we reach Pangong Tso. Jeeps will take us to nearby Shyok River Lodge, a very comfortable community-based lodge in a traditional village. Here, at the foot of the Karakoram, we stay for a week practicing yoga daily, going out on walks and excursions - 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 or 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 or taxi stand 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 itself, is worth the trip.

### **Day 04 & 05 Drive to Tsomoriri**



We'll take two days to reach Tsomoriri, as there is so much to be seen on the way. The first day, we'll drive up the Indus Valley, following the river till where the valley narrows and most habitation ends. Here we'll follow the road to Manali for a while, crossing the 5300m high Taglang La (motorable pass). After descending to the high valleys of Rupshu, we'll make camp near the stunning salty Tsokar lake.

The next day, we'll continue over a small road through grand mountain scenery to Tsomoriri. On the way, there is a good chance of encountering the wild Tibetan horses, called kyang. These beautiful creatures are also called Tibetan ass, but actually they are one of the seven subspecies of wild horses in the world, along the wild tarpan, the Prezwalski horse, and the zebra.

At Tsomoriri, we'll check into a tented camp, where we'll spend the night.



### **Day 06 – 17 Trekking from Tsomoriri to Pangong Tso**

The next morning we'll start our trek, first by following the shores of this huge, dark blue lake. Next morning, when you wake up at the sound of nothingness, you'll realize the breathtaking kind of adventure you've embarked upon! The all-encompassing wide and wild mountain

scenery is utterly magnificent, spellbindingly beautiful but totally desolate. It is so devoid of human influences and, in some ways, so mind numbingly stark, it makes you catch your breath. From now on, we're really on our own, though we'll occasionally encounter the *Changpa*, the Tibetan nomads that live here all year-round. Their lifestyle will be another one of the once-in-a-lifetime experiences you'll have during this trip. Can you imagine people living in tents – though made of thick, rough and black yak hair that absorbs solar energy very well – at winter temperatures of minus 30 degrees C (-22 F). The Changpa (singular: Changpo) are a tough, raw but happy lot, and devout Buddhists as well.

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.

The trek we'll be doing has hardly ever been done before, at least not by 'foreigners'. It is up to our horsemen – most of them of Changpa origin themselves – to guide us safely through this uncharted territory. We've got fifteen days to reach the other big lake, and that should definitely be enough. If all goes well, it will allow us to take a day off once or twice, relaxing at the camp or exploring its surroundings.

Reaching Pangong Tso will not be unlike finishing a pilgrimage with all its spiritual and emotional implications. This enormous salty lake straddles the border with Tibet (China). And, as is often the case with the most beautiful scenic pilgrim's destinations, you're unlikely to be the only one there. The stunningly panoramic vast blue expanse has become one of the most sought after destinations with the Indian tourists after the screening of a popular film that showcased this lake as a backdrop.

## **Day 18 - 24 At Shyok River Lodge**

After twelve days in a tent, sleeping on plush, comfortable mattresses, under freshly washed smooth, silky linen might come as a very welcome surprise. Shyok River Lodge is only two hours drive from Pangong Lake, elusively tucked away in a charming, traditional Ladakhi village. Here, amidst the waving, green barley fields and looking out on the easternmost part of the Karakoram Range, Shyok River Lodge will be your scenic haven for two days.

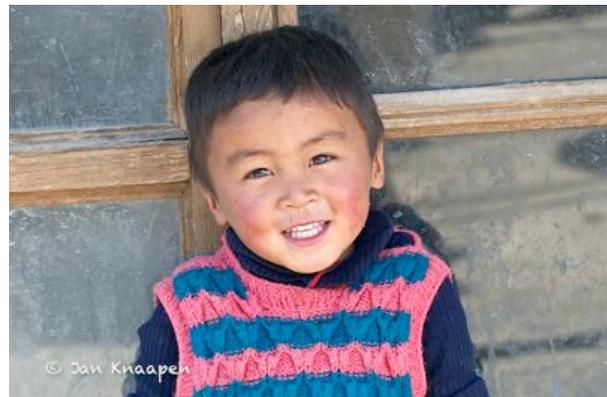
The village of Shyok, though accessible by road, sees very little traffic movement, and that's mainly locally stationed army personnel. Here, amidst the waving, green barley fields and looking out on the easternmost part of the Karakoram Range, Shyok River Lodge will be your magical abode for a week.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

During this time, you'll be taken on special village and nature walks in and around the village. You'll get a glimpse of the eastern ranges of the Karakoram and learn about the monks' way of life at the small local gonpa (monastery). The village is like one big connected family who will welcome you wholeheartedly, eager to show you their homes and their unique, traditional lifestyle. If the time is right, you can see and partake in the sowing, ploughing or harvesting of the barley. However, for the less curious, there's always the option of sneaking out and relaxing with a book in the hammock among the lodge's many willow groves.



### **Day 25: 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 26: 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 gumpa.



### **Day 27: 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 28: 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>.