

The path of the yogi: Walking the old Caravan Roads & Yoga Retreat

23 days / 9-day trek

Visit Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh, trek to Nubra Valley along an ancient caravan road, learn & practice yoga at an ecolodge.

Tour JTT-LA-TY01: Delhi - Leh – Diggar – Shyok – Pangong Lake - Sumur - Leh - Delhi

Group tour

Dates: July 1 – 23, 2015



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 it can be. Regular sports don't even come close to it. Though trekking seems to be mainly legwork, it's actually the whole lifestyle of exploring and sleeping under the stars that is so rejuvenating. Of course, the practice of yoga addresses all body parts, many of them unused in daily life. It is a spiritual practice for most people that is accompanied by a form of concentration which purifies and reorganizes the mind, leading to meditation. 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.

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. The highly valued Kullu opium was taken to China on this trail. 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 head back to Leh by jeep along a seldom-traveled road, following the Shyok River down to the idyllic Nubra Valley. This is home to many Buddhist monasteries that cling to the mountains and lush green apricot orchards. From here we'll cross another one of world's highest motorable passes, the Khardong La, on our way back to Leh.

Your yoga teacher: Ivonne Röthig

Yoga has been an integral part of Ivonne's life for more than 15 years. It proved to be such a turning point in her life that she decided to change the entire course of her life by beginning an open-end journey. Having taken this radical decision, she left her job and her home in Germany and embarked on a trip that took her to different parts of the Himalayas and Southeast Asia. But it was when she visited Ladakh in April 2012 that she fell headlong into a true and lasting love with the people, culture and landscape of this fascinating place.

Ivonne has extensive experience in both practicing and teaching yoga. Besides attending a 4-week Sivananda Yoga Teacher Training in Ranikhet in the Indian Himalayas, she has also studied with different Yoga Teachers from Thailand, Nepal, Germany and America. The dedicated learning, practicing a lot, and her own creative inspiration helped her fashion a unique way of teaching, which is a combination of Hatha and Flow Yoga, an interplay between movement, breath, awareness and energy. Her teachings are a balance of dynamic flows and relaxing asanas that can be challenging or soft, flowing or lingering, but always according to the level of the participants.



Ivonne's main aim of teaching yoga is to help yoga students understand their body and breathing better. To inspire them to find their own way of practice, their own limits and slowly, without forcing, to widen those limits, and finally to expand the yoga teachings from the mat to a way of life.

Ivonne teaches mainly in the Himalayas, in a combination of yoga with trekking, for intermediates as well as beginners. Follow her on www.eyesofive.com.

Supporting a green and just society

While trekking through Ladakh we'll be in an area where development is of the traditional kind and people generally live off the land like they've done for centuries. As you will find out on the trek and during your stay at SRL there are many positive things to be said about this traditional life (read f.i. Helena Norberg's book "Ancient Futures, learning from Ladakh", ISBN 9780712606561). But that does not mean that Ladakh is heaven on earth for all its inhabitants. There is definitely room for improvement, especially in terms of income, health care, education and environment. As a small token of respect and gratefulness to the cultural and natural beauty that we'll enjoy while traveling the area, we think it is only natural to lend a hand with some of these issues. In the case of this tour we are spending 5% of the 'land cost' (the amount spent on local travel arrangements) on installing dust-bins in the village where Shyok River Lodge is situated, as well as introducing the locals to the concept of garbage separation (and re-use) through education. In line with this we'll clean up the trail while we trek to SRL. The remainder of the budget, if there is one, will go to "Ladakh Nuns", a partly Dutch-funded project that tries to revive and rejuvenate the tradition of nuns in Ladakh. For more information:

<http://www.ladakhnunsassociation.org/>.

Itinerary

Day 01: Arrival at Delhi

At Delhi Airport you will be received by our representative and taken to your guesthouse not far from the airport for overnight stay.

Day 02: Flight Delhi - 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. You can choose to stay in the bustling centre of Leh or just outside the city in the rural community of Sankar.

Day 03 & 04: At Leh; day walk Likir - Ridzong

If you have arrived by flight, two nights in Leh is the absolute minimum to get acclimatized. We plan to take three nights, as we will be going to even higher altitudes. 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 some magnificent gompas (Buddhist monasteries). We'll drive down to Likir Gumpa. After visiting this picturesque monastery set atop a hill, we'll do a 5 hour walk along the beautiful village of Yangthang and down a narrow gorge to the hidden monastery of Ridzong, where the cars will be waiting. This day walk entails little climbing, and is a good way to get into the swing of walking. On the way back to Leh we'll visit the ancient gumpa of Alchi. This is considered the

oldest (roughly 1000 years old) and artistically most important gumpa of Ladakh.

Day 05 - 13 TREKKING from Leh to Shyok

On this trek we'll start from Leh. After passing the village of Sabu, we'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 Nubra and Shyok Valleys. It will take four days to reach the Diggar La pass (elev. 5400 m), including one day to allow our bodies to adjust to the rapid increase in altitude. From the Diggar La you'll get magnificent views of the Indus Valley and the jagged and colorful Zaskar Mountains. Achieving this spectacular vantage point will have been well worth the strenuous climb!



After a short descent we will leave the trail that continues to Nubra Valley and cross another pass. Traversing high meadows where yaks and goats graze, we'll 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 this trekking route is quite seldom traveled. As a result we can expect a healthy curiosity among the locals that may easily surpass our own. Another pass (this time an easy one!) will reward us with some spectacular views of the oasis of Tangyar. Descending through irrigated fields to this beautiful, well-maintained traditional village, you can't help but marvel at the industrious ingenuity of Ladakhi irrigation. This area sees hardly any rainfall and all crops, predominantly barley and more recently also mustard, have to be irrigated. Here we must pay attention to our footsteps - carelessly jumping over an irrigation channel could cause it to leak and may affect crop yield.



After Tangyar, the climb begins again. We'll take two days to reach the 5440 m 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 down-hill. 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.

During the trek we will do light yoga exercises every day. We start the morning with a small breathing exercise and meditation, followed by some sun salutations and asanas as a warm-up mainly aimed at stretching and improving the blood circulation before we start the walk.

7.00-7.30 AM pranayama/meditation

7.30-8.00 AM sun salutations/asanas

8.30 or 9.00 PM (some time after dinner before sleeping) meditation.

Day 14 - 19: At Shyok: YOGA RETREAT

Though accessible by road, the village of Shyok sees very little traffic. Here, amidst the waving, green barley fields and looking out on the easternmost part of the Karakoram Range, Shyok River Lodge will be our magical abode for a week.

Guided by our inspiring yoga teacher Ivonne, we will practice yoga asanas, basic pranayama and meditation every day. There will be yoga sessions in the mornings, while the afternoons will be free or spent on excursions. Late afternoon again there will be yoga sessions for those who are interested. The level and intensity is up to you. Naturally, you are always free to skip, exchanging your yoga mat for the hammock among the willow trees and a good book.

We'll start the day with some pranayama and meditation before breakfast. The main asana class is from 11.00 to 12.30 (after breakfast is digested and before lunch).

Another more relaxing late afternoon class of 1 hour will be given around 6 PM and a meditation some time after dinner and before sleeping.

So daily schedule is as follows:

07:00 AM - 07:45 AM pranayama/meditation

11:00 AM -12:30 AM yoga asanas



06:00 PM - 07:00 PM yoga asanas

08:30 or 09:00 PM meditation

Apart from daily yoga, we'll be taking walks around the village and in the beautiful natural surroundings. We'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 us wholeheartedly, eager to show their homes and traditional lifestyle. If the time is right we can see and partake in the sowing, plowing, or harvesting of the barley. In early spring we can help bringing the yaks to the high meadows where they graze during summer.

On the last day at SRL we'll take you on a day trip to the famous Pangong Lake. This enormous saltwater lake is just 2 hours drive from Shyok River Lodge. Straddling the border with Tibet (China), it has become famous in India because some scenes of the film, "Three Idiots" were shot there. The deep blue lake is situated at an altitude of 4400 m amidst barren, light-coloured mountains. It is an impressive sight - little fantasy is needed to imagine the conditions here in winter, and one is awestruck by the small community that lives here throughout the year. Lunch will be enjoyed in one of the finer tented accommodations near the lake... or if you prefer, picnic-style at a scenic spot.

Day 20: Shyok – Sumur (110 km, 4-5 hour)

After a week of yoga, relaxing and immersing in the quiet mountain village atmosphere of Shyok, we'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. In the evening we'll check into a comfortable lodge in Sumur - a small village near Nubra's capitol, Deskit.

Day 21: At Nubra, exploring the valley

In the morning, we'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 and fruit trees thrive well in the long, warm summers.

We'll visit two of the most beautiful gompas of Nubra, Deski Gompa high on a hill and the more hidden Samsthanling Gompa. Also, you can ride through the dunes near Hundar on Bactrians, descendants of the two-humped camels that worked the caravan trails from Yarkand to Kashgar. Though right on the banks of the river, the landscape is a true desert here. Riding camelback you may easily forget that we're actually in between the Himalayas and the Karakoram! In the afternoon, we can follow a small mountain trail that climbs high above the Nubra River to a small remote gompa where nobody goes.

There is an alternative programme as well. This is to ride the jeep all the way down to Turtuk (a small town not far from the Pakistani border). The jeep drive is a scenic one, as the Nubra Valley occasionally narrows to a gorge between steep walls over which a precarious 4WD road is cut. You'll notice changes in landscape and vegetation as well as changes in the cultural as we get lower. While in Deskit and Hundar the people are predominantly Buddhist, here the majority are Muslims. Due to the high fuel costs involved we have to charge an additional INR 5000 per car for this.



Day 22: Sumur – Khardong La – Leh (132 km, 5-6 hrs drive)

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

Day 23: Departure

Early morning you'll board the flight back to Delhi. This most likely leaves you with a full day to spend in Delhi, as most international flights depart late at night or very early next morning. Sight seeing in Delhi can be arranged (visiting Old Delhi Red Fort, Kutub Minar, Humayun's Tomb and Akshardam Temple, for instance). Also the use of a day room facility plus diner at a hotel close to the airport can be arranged.

Price

Group tour, with tour guide/ yoga teacher who speaks English & German.

Price: INR 177.750/ US\$ 2.885

Single Supplement: INR 58.500 / USD 950 per person.

Price includes:

- ✓ Western tour leader cum yoga teacher;
- ✓ Transfers between Leh Airport and hotel;
- ✓ 1 night accommodation at comfortable guesthouse in Gurgaon (Delhi);
- ✓ 3 nights accommodation before trek and 1 night after trek in Leh, in a pleasant hotel or very good guesthouse;

- ✓ 6 nights at Shyok River Lodge, a comfortable '3 star' home stay in a green oasis of a remote, traditional village;
- ✓ 2 nights at a comfortable lodge in Nubra;
- ✓ Full board (3 freshly prepared meals per day) while on trek, during the yoga retreat at Shyok River Lodge and in Nubra, room with breakfast only in Leh;
- ✓ All necessary permits (Inner Line Permits for Changtang/Pangong Tso and Nubra)
- ✓ Transportation to and from trek;
- ✓ SUV trip Shyok – Pangong Tso and Shyok – Nubra - Leh;
- ✓ Double tents with foam sleeping pads (advisable to bring your own sleeping mattress if you have a good one);
- ✓ Full-fledged trekking staff (cook, local mountain guide, and helpers);
- ✓ Dining tent (possibly 2) with small chairs and all necessary crockery and cutlery;
- ✓ Cooked or filtered water available at camp at all times;
- ✓ Team of horses with horsemen to carry all overhead and personal equipment (12.5 kg per person; so you only carry a day pack);
- ✓ Daily yoga & meditation practice (morning and evening) guided by Ivonne;

Price does not include:

- ✓ Travel Insurance
- ✓ Visa for India
- ✓ Lunch & dinner while in Leh
- ✓ Extra nights accommodation in Leh before July 5 or after July 27
- ✓ Sleeping bags, personal trekking clothing & gear
- ✓ Tips for local staff (approx. US\$125-175/€ 110-155)
- ✓ Alcoholic drinks; laundry service; telephone calls; other expenses of personal nature.

Please ask for quotation for additional services.

More information and booking

For more information on this tour and for booking please mail us at info@jantreksandtravels.com.

For more information on Shyok River Lodge, see: www.shyokriverlodge.com.

To be sure of a place on this awesome tour you are requested to down-pay 10% of the tour price (i.e. INR 17.775/ \$ 288) to our bank account:

Acc. no. 913020031243013
 Acc. holder Jan Treks And Travels

Address of acc. holder: G63, Regent House, DLF Phase IV, Gurgaon - 122002,
Haryana, India

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Bank address Axis Bank, Gurgaon DL Branch, Sco No. 120, Sector 46, Gurgaon,
Haryana – 122001, India

In case you're interested in other yoga tours and retreats please check our website:
www.jantreksandtravels.com/Yoga-toursEN.html.

Extension and preludial options

After reaching Leh at the end of the trip, in all likelihood you won'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 go here: <http://www.jantreksandtravels.com/Ladakh-toursEN.html>. And click on 'The Great Himalayan Crossing'.