

Yoga retreat at Shyok River Lodge with cultural tour of Ladakh & Takthok Festival - 15 days / 6-day yoga retreat

Visit the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh and Nubra and recharge practicing yoga at a secluded ecolodge.

Tour JTT-LA-Y01: Leh – Takthok - Shyok – Pangong Tso – Nubra - Leh

Group tour

Dates: July 23 – Aug 7, 2015

During this trip, you'll explore the Indus Valley, the heartland of picturesque Ladakh, visit its many Buddhist monasteries and then make a round-trip along the stunning cobalt-blue salt lake of Pangong Tso, situated at an altitude of 4400 m on the Indo-Tibetan border and the culturally well-preserved and secluded Nubra Valley. But the main event on

this tour will be a seven-day stay at a remote eco-lodge in the middle of a traditional village, facing the awesome Karakoram Mountains. Here you'll get an unforgettable experience in a magical setting learning and practicing yoga with Ivonne Röthig.



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.

Ladakh

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 eastern Ladakh, where the Indus flows on the first leg of its course from the holy mountain of Kailash (Tibet) down to the Arabian Sea, and where the capital Leh is situated, a large majority of the population practices Tibetan (Mahayana) Buddhism. Though it has been an independent kingdom for over 900 years before it was captured by a



maharadja from the Punjab and merged with Kashmir (later India), it shares much more than its religion with neighbouring Tibet. For instance the way the people have managed to eek a living out of an arid and high altitude environment where hardly anything grows, by an ingenious form of irrigation, or, on the higher parts, by living a fully nomadic lifestyle following their herds of yak, goat and sheep in their search for edible vegetation.

On this short trip, apart from spending time in the pleasant commercial capital of Leh, you'll see both lifestyles – the farmer's and the nomad's - and you'll be amazed and touched by the genuine goodness of the Ladakhis, the way their inner warmth and peace of mind offsets the unforbidding environment.

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/>.

Yoga retreat at Shyok River Lodge

After two days in and around the Indus Valley, in which we have to take it easy in order to allow our bodies to adjust to the altitude, we'll climb into jeeps and follow the ancient caravan route to Lhasa (Tibet). But not after a stop-over at the small hamlet of Takthok, where we'll attend a **Buddhist Monastery Festival**.

Climbing out of the Indus Valley you'll get awesome views of the Zaskar Mountains on the other side of the valley. But only after reaching the 5360 m high Chang La (pass) will you get a 'real' perspective on the word 'breathtaking'.

Luckily, you don't have to stay here long. While descending, you get glimpses of the Karakoram Mountains to the East, technically a whole different mountain range from the Himalayas where you have been traveling thus far. After veering off from the caravan road, you enter a beautiful and seldom traveled gorge. Coming out of the gorge you'll get a glimpse of an enchanting oasis of green fields and quaint charming houses on the banks of a big river surrounded by spectacular mountains. This is where you'll be staying the next seven days. Shyok River Lodge will be your mystical abode.

This community-based eco-lodge is housed in a traditional Ladakhi farm. Hardly distinguishable from the other houses in the village on the outside, it's the interiors that's different: simple but tastefully appointed rooms with locally crafted furniture, four-star bedding and clean bathrooms. Shyok River Lodge takes the concept of sustainable tourism seriously: you'll eat only organic vegetables that are locally grown (food will be strictly vegetarian and for those who prefer so, vegan), no non-biodegradable garbage is left behind and both the electricity and the hot water supply are solar-powered. For more information please see the website: www.shyokriverlodge.com.

We'll be practicing yoga daily. Yoga sessions will take 2 - 3 hours, generally in the early part of the day, so that afternoons are free for you to do as you like. There will be organized walks in and around the village and in the beautiful natural surroundings almost daily. We'll visit the small local gumpa (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, ploughing, or harvesting of the barley. On another day we'll take you by car to the legendary Pangong Lake - only 2 hours away from Shyok. But you are free to retire in the afternoon with a book to the hammock in the willow grove or just enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the remote mountain village.

For those who like, there will be a late afternoon yoga session accompanied by a healing massage on a first-come-first-serve basis, provided Ivonne has some energy left.

Visit to Nubra Valley

After the seven days of yoga at Shyok, we'll head back to Leh by jeep along a different route than the one we came over. This will take three days. Along a not much traveled road we follow the Shyok River down to the idyllic Nubra Valley. Here we'll stay in a pleasant guesthouse for two nights. Nubra is a small-scale version of Ladakh and home to picturesque Buddhist monasteries and lush green oases of traditional houses hidden among apricot orchards. You can visit some of the larger gompas here by jeep or do a camel ride on Bactrian (two-humped) camels through large sand dunes that have been formed out of the river sands here. The camels have descended from animals that used to work the caravan road to Yarkhand (Turkmenistan, present day China). Or you can discover small hidden gompas in the mountains that can only be reached on foot. Those who are interested can travel all the way to the Pakistani border by car. After two nights in Nubra we return to Leh over another high pass, the Khardong La. The views of Leh and the Indus Valley while coming down from the pass are truly amazing.

The next day you fly back to Delhi where the journey ends.

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: At Leh

Second day for acclimitization. You can eitehr enjoy the pleasant atmosphere in Leh, or go out on excursion by jeep to visit some of the many beautiful *gompas* (monasteries) in the Indus Valley. Your guide will advise and assist you with this.

Day 04: Leh – Takthok; attend Buddhist festival (45 km, 1.5 hrs drive)

We drive up the Indus Valley to Karu and from there to the small village of Takthok (3750m), where we check in to a simple home stay. Today is the first day of the local Buddhist Festival, held at the small but old and charming Takthok Gumpa. We'll attend the festival during the rest of the day.



Day 05: Takthok – Shyok (90 km, 4 hrs drive)

In the morning there is still some time to attend the second day of the festival.

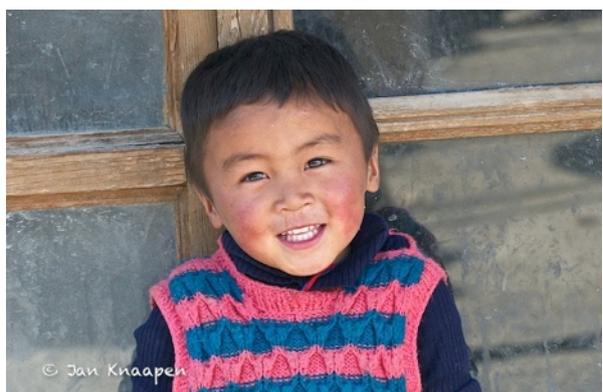
After that, a 4-hour drive, crossing the 5360 m high Chang La pass will take you to Shyok River Lodge. Out of the two former caravan roads leading out of Leh that are motorable these days this is the lesser known, though it does see a lot of traffic on some days of people going to Pangong Tso. This is the old caravan road to Tibet.

During the climb to the Chang La you get magnificent views of the Sakti-Takthok oasis and the Zaskar Range on the other side of the Indus Valley. While descending you can't help but noticing that you've landed in a much drier area with a distinctly remote feeling.

After reaching the small town of Durbuk we veer of the road and enter a seldom traveled canyon that gives access to Shyok on the wide and wild Shyok River There is time for visiting one or two lesser known gompas on the way.

Day 06 – 11: Yoga retreat at Shyok River Lodge

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 the yoga classes there will be village and nature walks, and we'll take you on a day trip to the famous Pangong Lake. This enormous saltwater lake is barely 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-colored 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 12: Shyok – Sumur (Nubra) (110 km; 4.5 hrs drive)

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 guesthouse in Sumur - a small village not far from Nubra's 'capital', Deskit.

Day 13: 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 in the long, warm summers. Today we'll visit some of the beautiful Buddhist monasteries of the Nubra Valley. And we'll ride Bactrian camels or do a walk.

The camel ride takes 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! If you opt for the walk, we'll take you along a small mountain trail that climbs high above the Nubra River to a small and remote little gompa. Even Lonely Planet has never been here!

Alternatively, you can choose for a long car drive up and down to Turtuk, near the border with Pakistan. 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 culture as we get lower. While in Deskit and Hundar the people are predominantly Buddhist, here the majority are Muslims. This excursion is at an extra fee of INR 5000 per car.

Day 14: 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 15: 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 116.750/ US\$ 1.895

Single Supplement: INR 37.500 / USD 610 per person.

Price includes:

- ✓ Western tour leader cum yoga teacher;
- ✓ Transfers between Leh Airport and hotel;

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