

IN SEARCH OF THE SNOW LEOPARD



DELHI – LEH – RUMBAK VALLEY – LEH – DELHI

Programme specially designed for

Mrs. Norton & Mr Jones

By

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The Snow Leopard!

The very name evokes all that is most wild, mysterious and elusive in nature - for this is an animal that comes cloaked not just in the subtle beauty of its own coat but also in all the high drama of the harsh and magnificent environment that it dominates.

To go looking for the snow leopard would appear to be the most forlorn of forlorn quests and yet, it is in the nature of such quests that the rewards lie as much in the journeying and the search as in the stated objective. The chances of actually seeing a snow leopard, especially in a relatively short period are slim indeed. The reclusive nature of the animal, the inhuman scale and



vertical topography of the habitat, the relative sparseness of snow leopards on the ground all combines to frustrate the seeker. But the snow leopard does not occupy this environment alone, it sits at the apex of a rich and diverse pyramid and in searching for this master predator we will be exploring its environment and all that live in it in some detail.

This diverse assemblage of fauna includes the blue sheep or bharal (*Pseudois nayaur*), the staple of snow leopard diet, ibex (*Capra ibex*), kiang or wild ass (*Equus hemionus kiang*), long-tailed (*Marmota caudata*) and Himalayan marmots (*Marmota bobak*), Tibetan hare, the pika (*Ochotona roylei*) or mouse hare, wolf (*Canis lupus*), wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*) and fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). The skies are patrolled by golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and bearded vultures

(*Gypaetus barbatus*), hobby's (*Falco subbuteo*) and kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) while on sunny hill-slopes plump Tibetan (*Tetraogallus tibetanus*) and Himalayan snow cocks (*T. himalayensis*) and chukor (*Alectoris chukar*) partridge feed warily.

Our search will not be a random one. However inaccessible the snow leopard's habitat may appear at first glance, the predator is tied to its prey, and in vast and inhospitable country the prey is concentrated in the relatively few hospitable areas. This narrows and focuses the search. Our expedition will concentrate on one such area in the Hemis National Park in Ladakh, south of the River Indus. This is an area that has been the location for snow leopard research and filming in the past. The bonus, and for many the real reward, is the exploration of the natural and



human landscape of snow leopard country. The mountains are rugged but indescribably beautiful, as streams and rivers that bring the area to vivid life water the valleys that seam this barren but colorful vastness.

One of the most attractive contrasts is between these stone-hard mountain people and the gentle and cheerful Buddhism that they practice. We will have time to visit some of their great monasteries as also their picturesque villages.



A number of factors have shaped this programme but the most important remains the Snow Leopard. While we have detailed a daily itinerary, this could change at the discretion of your leader who will base his decisions on maximizing your opportunities to see wildlife. That, and not covering ground as in a conventional trek, remains the focus of the tour.

Participants need to be in good physical condition, fit and accustomed to walking. Physicians' advice for all ages is a must. By

and large, people accustomed to hill walking and in reasonable condition will have no trouble. Age is no consideration. However, people with back trouble are not advised to risk the road journey.

A major military base, Leh itself is quite far from the borders with Pakistan and China and the large military presence makes it one of the safest places in India. Although it is a district within the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the ethnic and linguistic differences keep this region far from the troubles in the Kashmir Valley as also the insulation provided by the spine of the Himalayas.

The search for the snow leopard in the high Himalayas will be the adventure of a lifetime.

In Search Of The Snow Leopard

Day 01 Mar 05: Depart UK

Fly out on Virgin Atlantic or other airline of your choice.

Day 02 Mar 06: Arrive Delhi

Met on arrival at 1130 hrs and transferred to your comfortable Bed & Breakfast in New Delhi which is within easy walking distance from the bustling Khan Market and the very lovely garden tombs of the Lodi Kings. *Ahuja Residency (Breakfast)*

Day 03 Mar 07: Delhi – Leh

Transfer to the airport to board your flight to Leh. Met on arrival and transferred to your hotel in Leh. Balance of day at leisure to begin acclimatization. Leh is at 11400 feet already and the flight up from the plains means that you have to acclimatize gently without pushing yourself. The 3 ½ days scheduled here is the minimum required for the strenuous trek you will be undertaking. *Leh (B,L,D)*. **(AFTERNOON-GENERAL BRIEFING ON LADAKH AND ITINERARY)**

Day 04 Mar 08: LEH and SANKAR GOMPA:

The morning is at leisure. In the afternoon, after lunch, visit Leh, the capital of the historic kingdom of Ladakh and the present district of the same name. Stroll through the town, followed by a visit to Sankar gompa, a little over a mile from the market. *LEH (B,L,D)*

Evening-PRESENTATION ON SNOW LEOPARD, THREATS AND CONSERVATION

Day 05 Mar 09: DRIVE TO THIKSEY AND HEMIS MONASTRY.

Drive out today along the valley of the Indus River to Thiksey monastery with all the buildings climbing up a hillside and then to Hemis Monastery tucked away in a southern valley off the main Indus. This is the most famous monastery in Ladakh. Take a short walk to Kotsang – the retreat for Monks. This will aid in the acclimatization process. *(B,L,D)*.

Day 06 Mar 10: LEH - YANGTHANG

Drive out to Yangthang this morning to look for urial (wild sheep) and enjoy the unique scenery. On your return – time and energy permitting – visit Likir Monastery but ONLY as an option if you don't feel tired. *(B,L,D)* ***EVENING-FINAL BRIEFING FOR THE TREK***

Day 07 Mar 11: Drive to SPITUK and trek to ZINCHEN: (10,500ft/3,200m)

The trek begins from Spituk by crossing a bridge and walking southwest of the River Indus. Camp overnight. CAMP

Day 08 – 13 Mar 12 - 17: ON TREK IN SNOW LEOPARD COUNTRY



Partly camping and partly staying at local homes your schedule will be decided on a daily basis by your expert guide to maximize your chances of seeing wildlife – in particular snow leopard. Therefore for these 6 days in the mountains there is no fixed itinerary. **BE PREPARED**

FOR EXTREME COLD!



Colony (Breakfast)

Day 14 Mar 18: RETURN TO LEH FROM TREK

Walk back to your road-head where you will be met and transferred to your hotel in Leh. With a bit of luck you will have something to celebrate tonight. *(B, L, D)*

Day 15 Mar 19: LEH – DELHI

Fly back to Delhi where you will be met and transferred to the *Ahuja Residence, Defence Colony B& B*.

Day 16 Mar 20: DELHI

This is a buffer in day on Delhi just in case your flight from Leh is cancelled due to bad weather which can happen at this time of year. No sightseeing has been scheduled but you can co-ordinate with our representative in Delhi to arrange for a car and guide if you wish to cover some of the famous sights in the historic city. *Ahuja Residency Defence*

Day 17 Mar 21: DELHI - UK

International departure and arrival in London.

Price: Please enquire. Depends on group size and season of travel. Maximum group size 6.

Land arrangements are inclusive of : -

- > 03 nights accommodation in Delhi hotel named, inclusive of applicable taxes
- > meal plan as indicated, inclusive of applicable taxes
- > overland transportation throughout in airconditioned Toyota Qualis, with soft drinks/bottled water provided
- > portorage at airports and hotels
- > 5 nights in Leh with all meals included
- > Sightseeing in Leh with all entrances as per the itinerary
- > 7 nts/8days on trek with all services and meals on trek including homestay as required by the leader
- > Services of expert Ladakhi naturalist guide throughout the trek
- > Donation to the Snow Leopard Conservancy
- > Donation to tour operators for tigers (TOFT)

Land cost does not includes : -

- > International air fare
- > Items of personal natures such as alcohol, laundry, telephone calls,
- > High Altitude all weather sleeping bag
- > High Altitude clothing
- > Video Camera
- > Tips/ Gratuities
- > Airport Taxes