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SNOW LEOPARD TREKKING IN
LADAKH



LADAKH'S SNOW LEOPARDS

ABOUT LADAKH

Ladakh, in the Himalayan foothills of the far northeast of India, experiences a cold desert climate with long, harsh winters. In the coldest months (Dec-Feb), the temperature rarely reaches above freezing. This is, somewhat unfortunately, one of the best times of year to see snow leopards. The nights are chilling, with temperatures averaging 5°f (-15°c). Days are bearable, though still about 35°f (2°c).

Though India is predominantly a Hindu nation, the 'Little Tibet' of Ladakh has a large Buddhist population, the Dalai Lama taking residence here for one month a year. Visiting its many stupas and monasteries and observing the Buddhist culture is a significant part of the charm of visiting this remote mountain nation.

THE GHOST CAT

Conveying an almost mythical status, the snow leopard, or ghost cat, is a much sought-after sight. Residing at altitudes above 11,500 feet (3,500m), they are a particularly challenging quarry. Though the exact number is unknown due to their elusiveness and adverse terrain, it is estimated that approximately 4,000 snow leopards remain in the wild, only 300 of these residing in the mountains surrounding Ladakh.

QUICK FACTS:

- Leh is one of the highest towns in the world, at 11,550 feet (3,500m)
- Because of this, acclimatization is a significant consideration for visitors
- About 40% of inhabitants are Buddhist, many of whom sought exile from Tibet
- Despite its name, the snow leopard is more closely related to the tiger
- It has the longest tail of any big cat, used for balance while hunting & also for warmth
- Snow leopards can't growl or roar like other big cats. Instead they emit a haunting 'yowl' that can be distinctly heard for several miles
- A snow leopard sighting is by no means guaranteed & considered very fortunate



CLASSIC SNOW LEOPARD — TREKKING —

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WHAT TO EXPECT ON A SNOW LEOPARD TREK

From Leh, you will transfer to Rumbak village located in the Leh tehsil within Hemis National Park – the home of the snow leopard.

Appropriate clothing is essential (see packing list), as is ample acclimatization. At least 24 restful hours should be taken in Leh to allow the body to become accustomed to the elevation. Symptoms of altitude sickness can include headaches, nausea, loss of appetite and shortness of breath, and these should be closely monitored and addressed if persistent.

At an altitude of 13,000 feet (3,960m), it can be challenging for a three or four-night stay. While the lodge does have oxygen cylinders to assist with the affects of altitude, if symptoms persist, your trip may be cut short. It is also worth noting here that if you do not acclimatize in Leh you will not be able continue your trip to Rumbak.

Your residence is Rumbak Resort, a humble yet wonderfully adequate lodge situated in a river valley. The superb staff are both professional and charmingly hospitable, attending to your every need.

Spotters are in continual communication, notifying one another of sightings or signs, such as paw prints in the snow or indications of a kill. Guides will alert guests and make way to the area of the sighting. Trekking is taken at a slow pace given the climatic and topographic challenges, and much time is spent simply observing the terrain and looking for other wildlife, including Tibetan wolves, blue sheep, horned sheep, Eurasian Brown Bear and in the skies, lammergeier vultures and golden eagles.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The landscape alone is breathtaking, & not only due to the altitude
- Stargazing is also spectacular, with very little light pollution & crystal-clear night sky
- Expectations should be humble. Rangers are excellent at finding snow leopard in the area; a success rate of around 70% is common
- Hemis National Park is one of the best & most probable places to see snow leopard in the wild
- February & March are considered the best months for snow leopard trekking

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— EXPLORING LADAKH —

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A WEALTH OF CULTURE

Leh, the capital of Ladakh, offers a wealth of interest for several days of cultural sightseeing as you grow acclimatized to the altitude.

While it is strongly recommended that your first 24 hours should be incredibly relaxed to give your body ample opportunity to adapt, the town is filled with intrigue and fascinating architecture, sights and ceremonies.

Traditional dances and festivities take place fairly frequently. These ceremonial events are steeped in history and fable, with colorful masks and costumes worn by performers.

Thiksey and Hemis monasteries are strongly influenced by the architecture of Tibet, Thiksey particularly indicative of Lhasa's Potala Palace, the historical former home of the Dalai Lama and seat of Tibet's government and spiritual leaders.

Shanti stupa perched high on a hill overlooking the town is a Buddhist monument that instills a profound sense of peace and serenity. Though a modern structure, it was enshrined by the 14th Dalai Lama and contains relics of the Buddha.

The bustling Leh market is a wonderful attraction for visitors, filled with souvenir shops and cafés. Here, you can also find trekking shops if you require any additional equipment.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Thiksey Monastery contains 10 temples, a nunnery & a restaurant for visitors. A small entry fee is required, but you are then free to explore the narrow passageways
- The two-day Matho Nagrang Festival is held at Matho Monastery, falling on a changing date in February or March each year. This festival of color includes a traditional 'cham' dance & is a time when the oracles emerge after two months of meditation to predict future happenings
- The 17th-century Leh Palace was once the seat of the royal family. Covering nine levels, it presents incredible views of the town below, with some rooms established as a museum for visitors



RECOMMENDED PACKING LIST

Himalayan weather, even during the winter season, varies greatly and therefore layers are recommended. Following is a suggested packing list:

ITEM	✓	ITEM	✓
Thermal underwear		Sunscreen – SPF 50 or higher	
Warm cotton shirts		Mittens AND gloves	
Half-sleeved and full-sleeved pullover or fleece		Balaclava or Buff© and sun hat	
Thick down jacket		Waterproof day pack	
Breathable Waterproof jacket and pants		Lightweight binoculars	
Hiking pants		Spare camera memory cards	
Down or padded pants (optional)		Walking pole – optional	
Three-season hiking boots		Medication as required	
Hiking socks		Head torch with several spare batteries	
Soft shoes or warm padded slippers		Spare fully-charged camera batteries	
Good sunglasses		*Note: batteries depreciate far quicker in cold climates	