

WILD PHOTOGRAPHY HOLIDAYS



LADAKH, INDIAN HIMALAYAS

SNOW LEOPARDS & BUDDHIST FESTIVALS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snow Leopard photography
- Two separate Snow Leopard expeditions
- Diverse wildlife
- Experienced guides and spotters
- Traditional Buddhist culture
- Rumbak village homestay
- Shan at Uley wildlife lodge
- Luxury hotel in Leh
- Stok festival Ladakh (2 days)
- Ladakh winter landscapes
- Buddhist monasteries
- Medieval streets and bazaars
- Surreal snow clad landscapes

- Spectacular flights over the Himalayas
- Himalayan snow peaks
- Matho Buddhist festival (optional extension)

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the Himalayas, Ladakh is India's highest and most remote plateau. It is south of K2 the world's second highest mountain and the mighty Karakoram mountain range. Technically part of the Tibetan plateau, Ladakh is renowned for its stunning landscapes and unique wildlife. Ladakh was isolated for centuries to the outside world although it has been welcoming visitors for several years now. The Snow Leopard, also known as the 'Grey Ghost', roams freely through this wild terrain and has

become the holy grail for many wildlife photographers. Our fourteen day Snow Leopard expedition will give participants a deep insight into the Ladakhi way of life together with seven days out in the field searching for Snow Leopards with a local team of expert spotters and guides.

We will have two separate Leopard expeditions in different locations. The first based in the mountain village of Rumbak where we stay with local families who have always co-existed alongside the Snow Leopards. Our second location is Shan Lodge at Uley, a relatively luxurious accommodation in the mountainous heart of Snow Leopard terrain. During the tour as a whole we explore the very best locations that this Buddhist area can offer



the adventure travel photographer including exceptionally vibrant Buddhist festivals, palaces, Gompas, abandoned forts and busy Tibetan bazaars. Throughout we will be transported by our experienced Ladakhi drivers in spacious vehicles suitable for the sometimes challenging winter conditions. In addition to Snow Leopard images we can expect to return home with travel and landscape images second to none! For all nights in Leh we have chosen to stay in the Grand Dragon Hotel where participants can enjoy views of the snow capped mountains whilst relaxing in warmth and luxury, a welcome respite from the cold dry air outside.

For an excellent insight into Shan Lodge at Uley and their traditional Ladakhi way of life take a look at the captivating BBC film [On Snow Leopard Mountain](#) from Planet Earth 11 behind the scenes. It was filmed in 2015 and features Tsewang Norboo, as he shares his lifelong bond with snow leopards and the importance of community-based conservation. Set in the majestic Himalayas, the film offers a glimpse into Tsewang's life and the deep commitment behind Shan at Uley.

PHOTOGRAPHY TUTORS & GUIDES

The 2026 Expedition will be led by WPH owners Geraldine Westrupp and Martin Sammtleben who have visited this fascinating area many times over the last three decades. They have stayed in and photographed at all the locations mentioned in this itinerary and are well qualified to lead this expedition.

DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1: Delhi Airport

Our first evening in Delhi is spent at an Aero-city airport hotel where the group will meet together for a briefing regarding the following day's flight and dinner together with our Delhi representative.

Airport hotel (D)

Day 2: Flight from Delhi to Leh (3500m)

Our Delhi representative will transfer the group the short distance to the domestic airport for the early morning plane to Leh. The flight across the snow clad Himalayas is spectacular given clear weather, quite often you will glimpse Everest and some of the other Himalayan giants.



Leh is located at an altitude of 3500 metres. We will meet you at the airport for the transfer to our luxury hotel in the centre of Leh for breakfast followed by a rest for acclimatisation. There will be a get together for introductions together with an expedition briefing for all participants during the early afternoon. In the evening we will drive the short distance to Shanti Stupa for sunset over the Indus Valley and Namgyal Tsemo Gomba.

Grand Dragon Hotel Leh (B,L,D)

Day 3: Leh & Thiksey & Shey

This morning we leave Leh early to catch the haunting Buddhist chants and prayers at Thiksey Monastery which is situated in the Indus Valley. This monastery is in a remarkable location and we will be there at first light. The remainder of the day will be spent exploring the town of Leh with its ancient medieval streets, striking Gompas and palaces with superb vistas over the surrounding mountainous landscape.

Grand Dragon Hotel Leh (B,L,D)



Days 4,5,6: Snow Leopard Expedition

This morning after breakfast we leave Leh for the tiny village of Rumbak our mountain base deep in the mountains. Here we will meet our expert spotters who continuously search for sightings of the Snow Leopard. Each guest will be allocated a simple private room within different houses in the village. The rooms are carpeted and feature mattresses with thick Ladakhi blankets, pillows and a Bukhara style (wood burning chiminea) heater. Please note that a 4 season sleeping bag is recommended to ensure extra comfort against the cold. Our meals will be taken together as a group and we have our own experienced cooks on hand to make sure we eat well. The village itself is in a wonderful setting amidst snowy mountains featuring Buddhist Stupas and white painted

mudstone houses bedecked with fluttering prayer flags. Yaks, sheep and goats wander around the village during the daytime but are securely housed at night or they would surely become some lucky Leopard's evening meal. This a good area for snow leopard sightings as herds of blue sheep (Bharal) are common and they attract predators including the Snow Leopard. Yaks are housed in the village. Our priority in Rumbak is to encounter Snow Leopards and sometimes we will need to walk a few kilometres in the rarified air for better vantage points. If our spotting team hear about sightings in different areas, then if it is feasible we will travel by car to the area of the sighting.

Rumbak Homestays (B,L,D)

Day 7: Rumbak to Leh

Today we will head back to Leh although if there has been a snow Leopard sighting we will be able to spend more time in the village. The drive to and from the village is spectacular.

Grand Dragon Hotel Leh (B,L,D)

Days 8,9: Stok Guru Tsechu Festival

Stok Guru Tsechu festival is held in Stok village the home of Stok Palace. This is the present seat of Ladakh's royal family. We visit twice, the first day to photograph the preparations which include getting the costumes unearthed from storage, and rehearsals without costume. Not many people will be around for this and we can expect to get some interesting behind the scenes shots. For our second visit, the exciting masked festival is a fine



opportunity to photograph all the pomp and ceremony of the yellow hat lamas, traditional music and wild masked dancing which is both vibrant and energetic. The local people will turn out en-masse, many in their best clothes to witness the festival most famous for its oracles who make predictions for the coming year. The oracles are not monks but laymen who are trained by monks from the Spituk gumpa to allow the spirit of the deities to enter their bodies. Before the festival, these laymen live in seclusion in order to be spiritually cleansed and prepared by the monks. People from Ladakh firmly believe in the predictions made by the oracles.

Grand Dragon Hotel Leh (B,L,D)

Days 10,11,12: Snow Leopard Expedition Lodge, Uley

After breakfast we set off for three nights and four days on our second Snow Leopard Expedition. We will be based at the beautifully located Shan Lodge at Uley. At the heart of snow leopard territory this pioneering wildlife lodge is family-owned/operated nestled in the heart of Ladakh. The family have a commitment to wildlife, con-

servation, and provide heartfelt hospitality and delicious food. It goes without saying that the whole team will be committed to ensuring that we have the best opportunities possible of wildlife encounters, in particular the Snow Leopard. Other wildlife to be found in Ladakh include woolly hare, Royale's pika, Blue Sheep and red fox, Birds include Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, golden eagle, red-billed and alpine chough, several species of snow-finch and Himalayan snow-cock. Less common are the Tibetan wolf and Eurasian lynx. The family is headed by Tsewang Norboo who is a talented spotter and his son Morup, a superb photographer and environmentalist. Some of Morup's images are in our gallery and the header image of the Snow Leopard on a snowy Ridge across from Shan Lodge is also his work.
Shan Lodge at Uley (B,L,D)

Day 13: Shan Lodge and Basgo Fort

Sometime after breakfast and during the morning we will leave for Leh. We will stop for photographic opportunities en-route. After checking back into our hotel we will have



time for some last minute souvenir hunting in Leh and our last celebratory evening meal together in the Hotel's lush restaurant.

Grand Dragon Hotel Leh (B,L,D)

Day 14: Flight to Delhi

After an early breakfast we take an early flight back over the Himalayas to Delhi and homeward flights.

MATHO FESTIVAL EXTENSION, 2-4 MARCH

We are offering a 2-night extension in Leh based at the Grand Dragon Hotel. This is for guests who would like to go to photograph and experience the Matho Buddhist festival with Martin Sammtleben & Geraldine Westrupp. The price is £600.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All meals
- All accommodation
- All airport transfers in India
- English-speaking local guide

- Local/experienced wildlife spotters
- Shared use of spotting scopes
- local transport in private vehicles
- Return Leh flights from Delhi

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Travel and medical insurance
- Accommodation Day 14
- Alcoholic drinks
- Soft drinks
- Snacks apart from meals stated
- Tips for local staff
- India visa

ACCOMMODATION

Airport hotel Delhi (1 night).

Grand Dragon luxury hotel in Leh, en-suite facilities (6 nights).

Rumbak Village homestays in village houses, shared facilities (3 nights).

Shan Lodge Uley comfortable, heated wildlife lodge, en-suite facilities (3 nights).

FOOD

Western, Indian and continental-type food will be available in Delhi and in the Grand Dragon Leh. The standard of cuisine will be good in both Leh and Shan Lodge. In Rumbak our cooks will provide mainly local Ladakhi cuisine with some western dishes. Bottled and filtered water is readily available.



SPENDING MONEY

This always depends on personal spending habits. Prices in India tend to be cheaper than the West, although some things such as bottled beers can be similar. £190 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses, including approximately £90 for tips for local staff who we encounter on our expedition. This will allow money for soft drinks and/or beer and any non-included lunches. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs, there are cash machines in Leh and Kargil although there is sometimes a lengthy queue. Local sellers, can often ship bulky items for a small additional cost, some places in Leh take credit cards although the connections of the machines can be sporadic.

GUIDANCE ON TIPPING

Tipping is an accepted and expected part of Indian culture, although you should only tip for services that are performed well. The total amount that you can expect to pay in tips for your local guide, drivers, as well as hotel staff etc. is around £90 We will offer advice on tipping once you have arrived in India.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is recommended that you take out appropriate insurance to cover personal accident, medical costs, repatriation, and loss of baggage and holiday cancellation. We will need a copy of your travel insurance at the time of booking.



VACCINATIONS

You should visit your own doctor and dentist for a check-up prior to departure. Please make sure that your fillings are solid as sometimes the change in air pressure can cause toothache. Your doctor will have access to the most up-to-date information on the required vaccinations for India. A very good online resource is the National Health Travellers website at fitfortravel.nhs.uk

PASSPORT AND VISAS

A passport with at least six months remaining validity at the time of arrival in India and a current Indian visa are required for this trip. Please note that your passport needs to be machine-readable.

You will need to apply for your Indian visa in advance. Citizens of most countries are eligible for the Indian eVisa. Apply online at indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/ at least ten days before your planned arrival in India. If your country is not listed as eligible for the eVisa, you will need to apply for a standard visa from the relevant issuing authority in your home country. Standard visas can

take quite a bit longer depending on your location. We recommend you make enquiries and apply well in advance. Obtaining a visa is not the responsibility of WPH.

HEALTH

We will have a first-aid kit available at all times. Please bring your own small personal first-aid kit, along with any medication for personal use. Hand wash that can be applied without water is always useful for getting rid of germs and removing greasy traces from fingers that will be taking photographs!

We fly into Leh (Day 2) which is at an altitude of 3,500m. The maximum height we will sleep at is 4023m on Days 10,11,12. This means that if we take it nice and easy and drink plenty of liquids for the first few days we should not experience problems acclimatising to this height. For the first 2–3 days guests may experience minor altitude related discomforts such as headaches, lack of energy/appetite and breathlessness when moving too quickly or walking uphill. Our final information sent out to guests around a month before the departure will



address altitude issues fully although feel free to contact us with any questions previous to this.

CLIMATE AND CLOTHING

The winter weather in Ladakh will be dry and sunny with occasional snowfall. The sunshine often makes it feel warmer during the daytime although this is a high altitude desert and the air will be dry and lacking in moisture.

TEMPERATURES

In February the average high temperature is -1°C and the average low temperature is -12°C . March tends to be warmer with an average high of 6°C and an average low of -6°C . As we are travelling at high altitudes, the sun will be stronger. A good sunscreen, along with a brimmed/peaked hat and scarf for the neck are vital. It will also be important to drink a lot of water. During the afternoons/evenings/early morning when the sun is not direct it becomes very cold and full winter clothing will be necessary. Here are some suggestions:

- A warm down jacket
- Fleece lined trousers
- Waterproof/windproof jacket and trousers
- Fleece jacket
- Warm hat and fleecy neck warmer
- Warm hiking boots or snow boots such as Sorrels
- Lots of warm socks
- Good quality light gloves
- Waterproof/windproof gloves
- Thermal/smart wool under garments
- Good sunglasses and snow goggles
- Warm 4 season sleeping bag

Leh is a great place for buying inexpensive clothing suited to the climate and the cultural norms. There is also a good array of outdoor clothing and equipment for sale, sometimes copies and sometimes not.

CURRENCY

Indian Rupee. Money can be exchanged either at the airport or the first-night hotel. The first night hotel offers a fair rate and is a relaxing place to change money. There will be an ATM machine at the airport.

LANGUAGE

Though the most widely spoken language in North India is Hindi, most people speak some English. India is therefore an easy place to make friends and get to know local people. In Ladakh the locals speak Ladakhi, a Tibetan language. Zanskari is also an endangered Tibetan language. Educated Ladakhis and some Zanskaris usually know Hindi, Urdu, Tibetan and often English. Learning some basics such as common greetings will pay di-



vidends in terms of the warm reaction you receive from the people you meet along the way. 'Jullay' is the word used by all irrespective of age for hello, goodbye, thank-you, good-morning and peace!

DAILY ROUTINE

You will need to have an adventurous approach in both mind and body. The altitude will require participants to take things slowly and steadily. We will be walking through towns and villages, along well-defined trails and lakesides. We may traverse some rough terrain. We will often photograph when and where opportunities arise. This requires a certain degree of spontaneity from participants. Our journeys will always be punctuated with someone shouting 'Stop the car!' when a photo opportunity presents itself. There will also be opportunities for some early-morning rises to make the best of the dawn light, conditions and locations. The sun sets early and dramatically around 18:00, so evenings will be relaxed and focused on being sociable, dinner and will provide an opportunity to work on and view the day's images. There will be plenty of opportunity for reviewing images with each other and the photographic tutor.

KNOW YOUR CAMERA

It's important that you are familiar with the basic operation of your camera such as setting exposure/AF modes, aperture, shutter speed, ISO etc. Nowadays there is a huge variety of cameras and systems and while we will always do our best to help, it's impossible to know every model.



PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION

- Specially designed camera bags or rucksacks like F-Stop, Lowepro and Peak design.
- A camera with interchangeable lenses such as a digital SLR or a mirrorless system camera.
- A set of lenses to cover the whole range from wide-angle to telephoto, for example...
For full-frame cameras: 16–35mm wide-angle, 24–105mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. For crop format cameras: 10–20mm wide-angle, 17–50mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom.
- The longest tele-photo lens you own

- Tripod sturdy enough to support your long tele-photo lens/camera combination
- Spare camera
- Filters – neutral density, graduated filters and polarisers if you use these.
- Lens cloth
- Sensor cleaning device (optional)
- Lightweight ‘trekking’ absorbent towel for drying cameras and equipment
- Sufficient memory cards for the whole holiday as it may not be possible to buy more during the trip.
- A laptop with the image editing applications of your choice, essential for checking and presenting images

during the trip and for one-on-one sessions with the tutor. Some of the places we stay in have Wi-Fi, but it can be flaky.

- Backup storage device (optional)
- Spare batteries and chargers
- All the electrical sockets are compatible with European [Type C](#) and [Type E/Type F](#) plugs. All other plugs require an adapter, available locally.

PARTNERS

Although this is primarily a photography holiday, non-photographer partners will be very welcome as there are many options and interesting possibilities in addition to taking photographs.



MORE QUESTIONS?

While we hope that this information has answered most of your questions about the holiday, we know it will not give you all the information you need. If you have any more questions, please get in touch.

BOOKING THIS HOLIDAY

Fill in the [online booking form](#), or give us a call on +44 (0)1270 440222.

LINKS

View [images and information for this tour](#) on the website.

Read about [our approach to teaching photography](#)

IMAGES

Most wildlife images except the Yak on p.6 are by Morup Namgail. All other images by Wild Photography Holidays.

