

Ladakh – Birds & Mammals of the Tibetan Plateau

Tour Dossier Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Depart London.
- Day 2 Arrive Delhi; fly Leh.
- Day 3/5 Leh.
- Day 6/7 Tsokar.
- Day 8 Tsomoriri.
- Day 9 Leh.
- Day 10/11 Nurba Valley.
- Day 12 Leh.
- Day 13/14 Delhi.
- Day 15 Fly London.

Dates

2020

Friday 26th June – Friday 10th July 2020 Cost: £3,495

2021

Friday 25th June – Friday 9th July 2021 Cost: £3,495

2022

Friday 24th June – Friday 8th July 2022 Cost: £3,695

£500 reduction if booked without flights, land only trip
(Delhi/Delhi)

Single room supplement

£895



Images (from top to bottom: Tibetan Wild Ass, Thiksey Gumpa & Hume's Groundpecker



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Grading

Day walks only. Grade B. The high altitude will make some of you breathless at times (though the three full days spent in Leh should allow you sufficient time for acclimatisation).

Focus

Birds, mammals and the Buddhist culture and monuments of Ladakh.

Tsokar



Introduction

Ladakh is a dry and arid mountain kingdom, dominated by magnificent gorges, cliffs, plateaux and rugged snow-capped peaks. On this unique 15-day tour of Ladakh during high summer, we will be accessing its highest and most remote regions in search of many of the special birds and mammals of the Tibetan plateau. Beginning in Leh, after a spectacular trans-Himalayan flight from Delhi, we'll explore stunning high altitude and mountain landscapes in a region that lies in the rain shadow beyond the Himalaya, right on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. During three days in Leh, we will acclimatise, and enjoy the cultural and ornithological highlights (amongst them Ibisbills, Citrine Wagtails, Mountain Chiffchaffs and Red-fronted Serins) of the Indus Valley. Then, from Leh, we will visit Hemis National Park, the largest protected area in India and home such elusive mammals as Snow Leopard (winter only), Bharal (Blue Sheep), Shapu (Ladakhi Urial), before driving to the Tso kar Wetlands. Lying south-east of Leh at an altitude of 4,600 metres, the Tso kar basin is known for its population of Kiang (Tibetan Wild Ass) and breeding Blacknecked Cranes, Bar-headed Geese and Ruddy Shelduck. This region also has a small population of Tibetan Argali (Great Tibetan Sheep), while Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Partridge, Tibetan Sandgrouse and Ground-Tit are amongst some of the other special wildlife regularly seen here. Similar species, and many more, may next be encountered during a stay at Tso moriri Lake, a beautiful emerald blue lake that is the largest high altitude lake in the Trans-Himalayan region. Finally, a drive over the highest motorable pass in the world, the Khardung La (at 5,359 metres), to a fascinating and little-visited region of the Nubra Valley. This gives you opportunities to marvel at more of the cultural highlights and wildlife of the area. Next day a Camel Safari on the double-humped Bactrian camels will be organised. This unique safari has always proved to be a fascinating part of a Ladakh Visit. This marks our return to Leh and the end of this remarkable tour of one of the most beautiful regions on Earth.

This tour visits one of the most remote regions of the Indian subcontinent and gives you the chance to see much of its least known wildlife, through truly spectacular scenery.

Detailed Itinerary

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London on direct Air India or British Airways scheduled flight to Delhi.

Day 2

Leh, acclimatising to the altitude

On arrival in Delhi we will connect a morning flight to Leh in Ladakh, scheduled to arrive in the early morning. This is a spectacular flight, if the weather is clear, taking us over the Himalayan range to Leh, leaving the hot and humid monsoon plains for the arid rocky mountains of trans-Himalayan Ladakh.

Leh is situated at 3,500 metres. Acclimatisation is essential in order for us to enjoy our holiday to the full, and we will take things easy at first, spending three days in and around Leh in order to adjust to the altitude. For this reason, we will spend the rest of today relaxing in our hotel, which will either be the Hotel Lingzi or similar. The rooms are basic but comfortable with en suite facilities.

During the afternoon we will go for a walk through the old town to get oriented with this fascinating city. Some common birds seen around the town are Red Billed Chough, Black Billed Magpie, Mountain Chiffchaff and Black Redstart.

Below Leh, the Indus River flows through a wide flat valley.

Day 3

Leh, Alchi

Today we will drive down the Indus a distance of about 70 kilometres to Alchi monastery, which dates back to the 11th century. The artistic and spiritual details of both Buddhism and the Hindu kings of that time in Kashmir are reflected in the wall paintings in the temples of Sumtsik and Dukhang, which house some of the most exquisite Indo-Tibetan art in India. This afternoon we walk among green fields, poplar and willow groves sit either side of the stony banks of the great river, and these harbour most of the region's small birds and mammals looking for Ibisbill, Hoopoe, Hill Pigeon, Bluethroat, Hobby, Citrine Wagtail, Scarlet Rosefinch and three rather plain but interesting specialties of the region: Mountain Chiffchaff, Hume's Short-toed Lark and Hume's Lesser Whitethroat. Time permits, we will explore Leh Palace and the town's lovely market. We will then head back to our hotel for overnight.

Day 4

Around Leh

This morning we will drive to Changla Pass which is the third highest motorable road in India. In the afternoon we will indulge in some birdwatching in the area around the hotel and the banks of the Indus. We will be looking out for typical birds of these mountains, such as Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle, Chukar Partridge, Great Tit, Hill Pigeon, Rock Dove, Raven, and both Chough and Alpine Chough. Black Redstarts and Common

Rosefinches are everywhere and we can also expect to see some of the less common species such as Brandt's Mountain Finch, Tibetan Snowfinch and Eastern Great Rosefinch. Late in the afternoon we will be driving to Choglamsar village which is situated on the bank of Indus River. The village falls off the main road from Leh, and is an important center for Tibetan Culture, History and Buddhism. Tibetan children village has library, Medical center, and Traditional Handicraft shop and study center.

Day 5

Leh – Zinchen – Leh

By now we should be fully acclimatised for the climate of Ladakh, and we will drive to Zingchen, a tiny settlement consisting of just five houses. Although only a short distance from Leh, we are now really in the mountains, and almost every winter Snow Leopards come down to raid the sheep pens here, and Dhole (Indian Wild Dogs) have also been seen. Zingchen is a good area for Bharal and we hope to see one. From now on we will be looking out for typical birds of these mountains such as Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle, Chukar, Hill Pigeon, Red-billed Chough, Alpine Chough and the exquisite Stoliczka's Tit-warbler. Black Redstarts and Common Rosefinches are everywhere and we can also expect to see some of the less common species such as Plain Mountain Finch, Tibetan Snowfinch and Eastern Great Rosefinch.

Time permitting, we will also look for bird's along Shey and Tiksey marshes. It is must visit place for any birder, Shey marshes are located in the outskirts of Leh. The birding area extends upto Tiksey monastery. One can expect Common Swift, Orinetal Turtle Dove, Eurasian Jackdaw, Common Rosefinch, Hume's lesser white Throat, Blue rock thrush, BlueThroat, Citrine Wagtail, Hume'e short-toed lark, citrine and grey wagtail etc.

Those with a cultural streak may transfer their attentions to the Shey, and Tikse Monasteries. The latter is one of Ladakh's largest religious communities and is a most imposing structure, resembling a miniature of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Shey is an old summer palace of the kings of Ladakh and houses a huge golden Buddha, which is over 12 metres high and was made in the 17th century.

Day 6

Tsokar

We start out early in the morning and drive to the Tsokar Wetlands. Lying south-east of Leh on the western edge of the Tibetan Plateau at an altitude of 4,600 metres, the Tsokar basin is known for its population of Kiang (Tibetan Wild Ass) and breeding Blacknecked Cranes, Bar-headed Geese and Ruddy Shelduck. This region also has a healthy population of Tibetan Argali (Great Tibetan Sheep), while Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Sandgrouse and Ground-Tit are among some of the other special wildlife regularly seen here.

On arrive we set out to explore the Tsokar area on foot and will have an opportunity to spot some of the wildlife and birds for which the area is famous for. It is a birdwatchers paradise and one can spot numerous migratory birds here. Some birds which can be seen here are Little Owl, Tibetan Sandgrouse, Himalayan Griffon, Black-necked Cranes, Black-headed Mountain-finch, Blanford's Snowfinch, Black-winged Snowfinch.

We will spend two nights here in a beautiful location in a tented camp. The local inhabitants here are known as Changpas. They are a nomadic pastoral community who move from pasture to pasture with their Yaks and the Pashmina Goats.

Day 7

Excursion to Nuruchan and Startsapuk Tso

In the morning from our base in Tsokar, we will spend a day exploring the areas around Nuruchen and the sweet water lake of Startsapuk. Here we will look for Lesser Sand Plovers, Voles, Argalis, Black-necked cranes Upland buzzards, Woolly Hares, Brown-headed Gulls and Ground-tit.

We will drive back to Tsokar in the evening for overnight in a tented camp.

Day 8

Puga, Sumdo and Tsomoriri

In the morning from our base in Tsokar, we will spend a day exploring the areas around Puga and Sumdo. The former, a couple of hours away, is best known for its hot sulphur springs and their reputed medicinal properties. The meadows, marshes, streams and high rocky slopes of the Puga Valley also provide a variety of habitats for birds. This area is known for its breeding Black-necked Cranes, which we will look for here, as well as for such other specialties as Ibisbill, Tibetan Partridge, Horned Lark, Upland Buzzard, Ground-Tit, Great Rosefinch and both Robin and Brown Accentors. A good variety of mammals may be seen here too, amongst them Himalayan Marmot, Blue Sheep, Tibetan Wolf, Woolly Hare, Ladakh Pika, Red Fox and Mountain Weasel. From Puga we will drive for an hour to Sumdo, one of many Tibetan settlements in Ladakh, to enjoy the rich avifauna, including flagship species such as Lammergeier, then carry on towards Tso Moriri.

This beautiful emerald-blue lake, the largest high-altitude lake in this trans-Himalayan region, is well known for both its breeding wetland birds as well as its scenic beauty. The lake (also known as the Tsomoriri Wetland Conservation Reserve) lies in the Changthang area of Ladakh and is an important breeding area for Bar-headed Geese. Common Redshank, Ruddy Shelduck, Lesser Sand-plover and many other species also breed here. We will spend some time exploring the lake and we will also visit the ancient village of Korzok, set around a Tibetan Buddhist monastery

which belongs to the Drukpa path of Tibetan Buddhism and houses a Shakyamuni Buddha and other fine Buddhist statues.

Ibisbill



Day 9

Leh

Most of the day is spent enjoying the beautiful passes, mountains and sceneries on our long drive back to Leh via Mahe Bridge. We will spend our last two days in Leh at Hotel Lingzi or similar.

Day 10/11

Nubra Valley

In the earlier morning, we will be transferred by road to Nubra Valley via Khardung la (claimed to be the world's highest motorable road, at an altitude of 5,758 metres). Time permitting, we will visit the Samsthaling Monastery, which is over 150 years old and is a large complex with seven temples. Inaugurated by the Dalai Lama in 1962, it is a busy friendly place where young monks can be heard chanting or seen at work cultivating apricots and apples. The prayer rooms that are open to the public house an impressive collection of 'thangkas' (scroll paintings) and

excellently restored frescoes. On arrival here we will check in to our accommodation for two nights, the Nubra Organic Retreat campsite in the beautiful village of Hunder.

Nubra Camp is a simple tented camp in apple and apricot grove offering unparalleled views of the surrounding mountain ranges and Nubra Valley. The camp is managed with the simple goal of having a sensitive approach to tourism. The tented accommodation is well appointed, spacious and comfortable. Each tent has an en suite bathroom and private verandah which is an ideal place for enjoying time out in the middle of the day! Alternatively, you will have a chance to explore the beautiful village of Kyagar, or visit a local family house.

Next day, visit Chamba monastery of Hunder and then start the Camel Safari on the double-humped Bactrian camels. This unique safari has always proved to be a fascinating part of a Ladakh Visit. The 'ship of desert' is something more than just a mode of transport in the frozen desert of Ladakh. In olden days they were the main mode of transport on the Ladakh – Yarkhand (Turkmanistan) trade route. These double humped camels were earlier used by traders as pack animals to load spices, fruits, clothes, etc. The Safari goes along the soft white sandy deserts with rolling sand dunes. Arrival at the capital of Nubra i.e. Diskit.

Day 12

Leh

Today, we will depart early in the morning to Leh to avoid the traffic rush and congestion in Khardung La. We will stay an overnight in Leh before taking the flight back to Delhi.

Day 13

Fly to Delhi

We must now leave the spectacular mountain kingdom of Ladakh and fly back to Delhi where we spend our last night in a 5-star hotel and the whole of the next day visiting the essential historical sites in Delhi to complete this special tour of one of the most beautiful regions on Earth.

Our stay in Delhi for this holiday is usually at the 5-star hotel, usually The Holiday Inn New Delhi for a convenient access to the Delhi airport, (we cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavor to book one of a high standard not far from the airport). The hotel features an array of eclectic and exciting eateries. Whether you're looking for a quick bite while you're on the go or a comfortable setting in which to savour a meal, tantalizing options, are at hand. With a varied variety of three



restaurants and lounges at Holiday Inn, you can indulge in different Asian cuisines. We may also make use of its facilities, which include a pool and a spa and health centre before the next phase of our journey. Our stay in this comfortable hotel is well deserved before a long flight! If we do not stay at the Holiday Inn, a hotel offering an equivalent standard of rooms and service will be used.

Day 14

Sightseeing, Delhi

There may be time for some city sightseeing today and to sample some of Delhi's historical sights. Old Delhi pulses with energy and colour – the hustle and bustle of bazaars thronging with people assaults the senses and narrow lanes twist and turn between tall leaning houses, from which the sounds and aromas of the Indian subcontinent emanate, enveloping the visitor. In Old Delhi you will see the famous Red Fort (this and the Taj Mahal were both built by the Emperor Shah Jehan), the Jama Masjid Mosque with its tapering minarets and wonderful marble domes, and Chandni Chowk (Old Delhi's business nerve centre), which provides a chaotic but fascinating snapshot of commercial life to a noisy backdrop of traffic and voices. We are unable visit Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary as it is closed between May and September.

We check out of our hotel at midday and, after spending the rest of the day sightseeing, there should be time for a farewell evening meal at one of the traditional Indian restaurants before our late night transfer to the international airport.

Day 15

Fly London

We depart Delhi in the early hours of the morning on a scheduled Air India or British Airways direct flight to London, arriving home in the early morning.

NB. Please note that the itinerary offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some reordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Grading (This is not a trekking tour)

Day walks only. Grade B. The high altitude will make some of you breathless at times (though the three full days spent in Leh should allow you sufficient time for acclimatisation).

Carry a daypack for cameras, water bottle, jumper, waterproofs and so on. Lightweight walking boots are recommended, and boots of some kind are essential.

Weather

Ladakh sits in the Himalayan rain shadow and therefore avoids the monsoon that affects the rest of India at this time. Ladakh is generally dry, although there may be a little cloud and occasionally some rain (so please do bring waterproofs!). Generally you can expect warm (24°C or more) sunny days and blue skies. However, be aware of the intensity of the sun's rays in this thin air – you will need to guard against sunstroke and sunburn by using a hat and sun cream. At this high altitude nights can be chilly, though temperatures are unlikely to fall below freezing point.

Clothing

Please read our separate clothing list, included in the pre-departure information which is sent on booking.

One set of smart casual clothes will be useful in Leh and Delhi. On other days, shorts or cotton skirts and light shirts (preferably with long sleeves) will be most useful during the day, but much warmer clothes at night are essential.

Food & accommodation

All meals and accommodation are included in our price except for lunches and dinners in Delhi. Allow £40 in total for this.

Accommodation at Tsokar and Tsomoriri are in tents at a campsite. These are nearly near water sources, and they are identified in advance by the villagers of the area. Usually, a hot breakfast and dinner are provided plus a packed lunch. The menu will change each day. Toilet tents are used at the campsites for the time we are at these two locations. Both campsites on this tour are in scenic locations!

Flights

We use the direct scheduled service of Air India or British Airways for this tour.

Mammal, bird & plant lists

Where available these are automatically provided, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

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Tour leaders

Sujan Chatterjee, Durgesh Singh, Yusuf Rizvi or Kaustubh Muluy.

Special permit – important

In addition to entry visas, we will also require a special permit to visit Hemis National Park. You will need to provide us with the scanned or photocopies of your passport (clearly showing your photograph, passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) and scanned or photocopies of your Indian visa **five weeks** before departure to obtain the permit.

Please provide us with your passport details (passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) at the time of booking. It is important to note that arrangements will be booked using the same passport details that you provide us at the time of booking, and it will not be possible to change these details once they have been booked. (If you renew your passport after booking, please also bring the old passport whose details you gave us at the time of booking as this will also be required).

How to Book Your Place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Please provide us with your passport details (passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) at the time of booking. It is important to note that game safaris will be booked using the same passport details that you provide us at the time of booking, and it will not be possible to change these details once they have been booked. (If you renew your passport after booking, please also bring the old passport whose details you gave us at the time of booking as this will also be required).

On the July trip:

Tibetan Sandgrouse, as its name implies, is a difficult species to see despite occurring across a wide range of central Asia. Our summer tour to the spectacular high trans-Himalayan region of north-western India, 'Ladakh - Birds & Mammals of the Tibetan Plateau', provided our group with great views of this sought-after species in the Tsokar region, though sadly one was taken by a Saker Falcon!

Tibetan Sandgrouse



Saker Falcon



Tsomoriri Lake



Himalayan Snowcock



Chukar partridge



Tsomoriri Lake

