



# LADAKH: MARKHA MAGIC



*This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.*



*In the Markha Valley. Photo Duncan Wells*

- **A classic and colourful quality trek**
- **Remote villages and encounters with locals give a good balance**
- **Compact itinerary with good acclimatisation**
- **Highest Point Lalung La (5334m)**
- **Beyond the monsoon**

## **India and Ladakh**

High Places began in India. 1987 saw our very first trip set off to trek in the Garhwal Himalayas in north India. We have gradually widened our destinations and now also go to Ladakh, Sikkim and to Kerala. If you are looking for an authentic, energetic yet sensitive holiday in India we are the specialists. Moreover we continue to hold India in great respect and have a deep regard for the land and its peoples. To travel with High Places here will disprove many of the myths you might hold and leave you with a sense of wonder and incredulity. There is a life-force in India which we may already have lost in the west. You must go and see for yourself.

The mountain kingdom of Ladakh is a remote region of wide arid valleys, rocky gorges and ridges leading to peaks over 6000m. It lies in the rain shadow north of the Himalayan divide and so avoids the influence of the monsoon. It is subject to extremes in temperature, with hot summers and very cold winters. Little wonder that the Ladakhis are a hardy and self-sufficient people. Through ingenious irrigation systems, the villages in summer are oases of green barley fields; isolated splashes of colour in the desert landscape. Prayer flags, chortens, and mani walls of carved prayer

stones are a constant reminder that Buddhism is a way of life, with symbols and spirits from pre Buddhist times incorporated into the present day faith.

### **The trek**

A delightful route through constantly changing scenery. The Markha Valley is at times wide enough for a village with its irrigated crop of barley, where men and women working in the fields greet us as we pass by. At other times it is little more than a rocky gorge. Some days are short due to the altitude and the need for acclimatisation, with the possibility of afternoon forays from camp.

We will be supported by a team of horses. Tents, food and baggage accompany us and on trek we only carry what we need for the day ourselves.

### **Accommodation**

In Leh, the hotel is simple, but clean with en suite facilities. On trek we use two person tents, with a larger communal tent for meals. In Delhi we stay in a comfortable hotel.

### **Food**

Whilst 'on trek' all meals are included. In Delhi and Leh we provide bed and breakfast only. This allows you the option of choosing where you would like to eat which is very much part of the adventure. On trek we eat Indian or Chinese food prepared to a surprisingly high standard. There are always several dishes: dhals, vegetables and sometimes meat if fresh chicken or lamb is tracked down. Breakfasts and lunches are varied and appetising.



*Young shepherdess at Nimaling*  
Photo Maggie Graham

### **Altitude**

Above 3000m, the air is thinner, the pressure is lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Acclimatisation is the process by which the body adapts to these conditions. The key to acclimatisation is a good itinerary with a gradual initial height gain, walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable above 3000m. There are lots of tea houses along the way.

### **Transport**

To and from the trek/climb we travel by jeep.

### **Health and Hygiene**

We have an excellent record of staying fit and well in India. The key seems to be our enthusiasm for Indian vegetarian food, (most of India is vegetarian), and care with water, peeling fruit, avoiding salads etc. We would recommend abstinence from meat in Leh before the trek. Laundry facilities in towns are always available in India. Their ability to transform a bag of dirty and crumpled trekking 'rags' into a pile of pristine, folded and ironed 'new' clothes constantly amazes.

### **Climate**

In Delhi it will be hot around 35°C, and wet. During the monsoon (June to mid September) it rains almost every day, often in a downpour, but the sun comes out between showers. Beyond the monsoon in Leh and on the trek it should mostly be hot and dry, but rainfall (and snow) are always possible in the mountains. At night on the trek, temperatures could drop well below freezing, especially at the high camps so suitable clothing is required.

**Language**

There are 14 major languages in India and around 200 minor languages and dialects. Hindi is the most important Indian language and is spoken by about half the population. Both English and Hindi are used administratively throughout the country. Many people will speak English, but a willingness to pick up some basic words of Hindi and/or Ladakhi may enrich your trip.

**Tipping**

It is custom and practice to tip in India. You should perhaps allow the equivalent of around £40-50/NZ\$90-115pp or so which would normally be given by the group at the end of the trek. Try to avoid giving sweets, biscuits, pens or cash to children or anyone who has not rendered a service.



*Loading horses*

### DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

**This trip is 15 days ex DELHI. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival in and departure from INDIA, and may not be the days you leave or return home.**

- DAY 1 Arrive Delhi. Hotel.
- DAY 2 An early morning flight across the Himalayas to Leh - a tremendous experience! There is time to relax and recover in Leh before the trekking starts. (B)
- DAY 3 Leh (3505m). Acclimatising to the altitude and the culture. Leh lies on a trade route centuries old. A busy market town with a bustling bazaar, it is overlooked by the remnants of a magnificent palace built at the beginning of the 17th century. Today we will visit some of the famous Gompas (monasteries) in the area. (B)
- DAY 4 Leh (3505m). An acclimatisation walk around the Leh Valley. After a visit to the Royal Palace perched above the town, we head up on a winding path to Tsemo Monastery for tremendous views of the valley. The afternoon is free. (B)
- DAY 5 Our transport follows the Indus River to Chilling & the confluence with the Zaskar River. We cross the Zaskar on a swing bridge to meet up with our ponies and crew. An easy walk on a good path leads to our campsite at Skiu (3100m). There will be time to visit Skiu Gompa in the evening. 4 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 6 We follow the Markha Valley past friendly locals and intricate irrigation systems designed to maximise the barley crop, then spectacular sheer rock walls below high peaks. We camp at approx 3600m outside the village of Markha and if we are lucky, may be offered tea in a typical Ladakhi kitchen. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 7 The valley changes continually and at times forms a steep sided gorge. Stacha Gompa, perched high on a cliff is well worth an hour's detour. The climb is steep but the monks use this path to collect water! We camp beyond Hankar at Tahungtse (3940m), having first glimpsed the snowy slopes of Kang Yhatse ahead. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)



*Markha Valley. Photo Max Holliday*

- DAY 8 Leaving behind valleys and canyons, we enter into high mountain country and climb past surreal rock formations with Kang Yhatse looming ever larger in front of us, to camp at the high meadow, Nimaling (4600m). 5 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 9 A well deserved rest day at Nimaling, 'the meadow of the sun', dominated by the twin summits of Kang Yhatse. Sheep, goats, cows, yaks and dzos all spend their summers here which provides grazing and keeps them away from the valuable

barley crop lower down. For those with energy to burn there is an option to climb to a high point above camp with great views. (B,L,D)

DAY 10

Leaving Nimaling, we head slowly up towards Lalung La (5334m). Crossing this little used pass is a

big achievement and a fitting climax to the trek, with views stretching as far as Tibet and the Karakoram. We rest a while at the prayer flag strewn summit then begin our descent to camp at a shepherd's settlement. 8 hours. (B,L,D)



*Near Lalung La. Photo Maggie Graham*

DAY 11

Our descent continues and we cross a few rivers to reach our final camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 12

Dropping down to the village of Latho, we meet our transport. There should be time to visit Thikse or Hemis Gompa before returning to Leh. (B)

DAY 13

A final day in Leh to catch our breath and wander around the town with time to buy some souvenirs. (B)

DAY 14

A memorable flight across the Himalayas and a dramatic end to our adventures in Ladakh. Hotel. (B)

DAY 15

Depart Delhi, extend your trip to spend an extra night or two in Delhi, visit the Taj Mahal, or continue with your own arrangements. International flights should depart after 1300 to allow for the possibility of a delayed flight from Leh.

ML 12/09