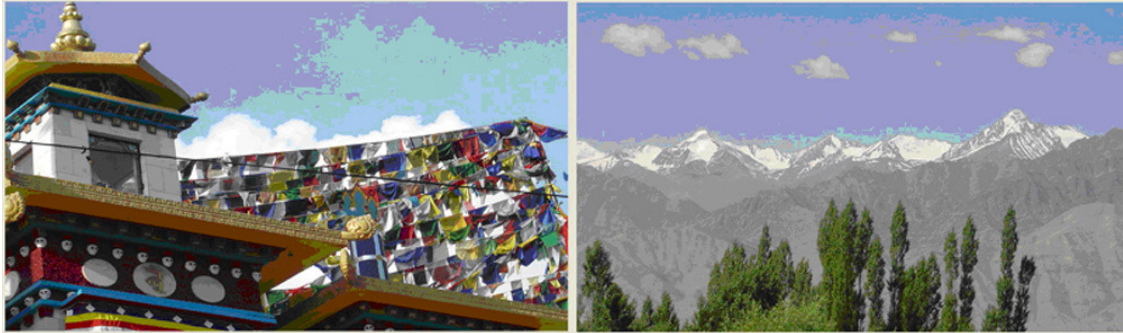


Markha Valley Trail with Stok Kangri, (6137ms) Ladakh, Indian Himalayas



This outstanding trek along the wonderful Markha Valley Trail and reaching also to the summit of India's highest mountain Stok Kangri, (6,137m/20,130ft) is perfect for trekkers, who want the Markha Valley Trail before summiting an Indian Himalayan Peak. The climb is a perfect follow-on for those, who have climbed Kilimanjaro, and it takes you over the 6000 metres threshold. It is also a superb introduction to Himalayan climbing. Ice axe and crampon techniques may be learned during the approach. The climb affords stunning views extending across Ladakh to the Karakorams, the Himalayas and into Tibet.

Your Stok Kangri programme takes you from Delhi (please ask our office quote for your hotel and sightseeing) to the Ladakh town of Leh, where you will have plenty of time to acclimatise to the high altitude. You will spend several days acclimatising by visiting the colourful monasteries at Shey, Thikse and Hemis and visiting the world highest motorable road at Khardungla before setting off on the memorable trek to Stok Kangri.

On this particular itinerary, we do not take the standard trek route but begin from the little village of Chilling, the only village where metalwork is done in Ladakh. Spending a night here, we cross the Zaskar river by cable to meet with the ponies on the other side and joining the popular route at Ski. At the end, after crossing the Kongmarula, we again make a diversion into a lesser known but again another beautiful valley with high pastures and great views to Stok Base Camp and the ultimate highlight of our trip – the summit of Stok Kangri (6137m). Stok Kangri is one of the main peaks of the Zaskar range. This high and arid landscape has captured the imagination of travellers since it first opened to visitors in 1974.

There is a contingency day allowed for the climb. Should you not need it, you will have a day to rest in Leh, shop for gifts, and really soak up the atmosphere of this lively, friendly place; then you will fly back to Delhi and the UK.



Day 1: Fly to Delhi, India

Flight to Delhi, Delhi hotels and transfers are not included in the cost. Please contact our office for flight options. As ATOL licensed tour operators we are able to offer you a range of competitive fares to Delhi; and your holiday will be protected by our ATOL bond. In Delhi we can offer a range of hotels and sightseeing tours.



Day 2: Fly Delhi to Leh, Ladakh (3,200m)

After an early morning breakfast you will be transferred from the hotel to the airport, for the sweeping panoramic flight (included in your tour cost) to Leh (1hr). The flight takes you over the Greater Himalaya and lands at one of the highest airports in the world. You can hope to get excellent views of Stok Kangri as you fly-in. Once in Leh you will have gained an altitude of almost 3,200m

and so can expect to feel the effects of the rarefied atmosphere. The expedition is tailored in a way that you have the first few days in your programme to relax and acclimatise. Flying straight up to 3,200m from sea level is not something you will do often in your lifetime!

Today, you can take it easy & relax in the hotel and surrounding area. Ladakh's landscape, Leh's friendly people, and the laid back atmosphere of Leh town make it a quite place to visit. The region's landscape is rugged, situated amidst multiple-hued mountains on the fringe of the life-giving Indus River. After lunch, depending on how you feel, you can take a slow walk around the local bazaar in order to get used to the area, altitude and climate. A memorable sight, the bazaar hosts traditionally attired women selling fruit & vegetables and spinning & knitting, whilst exchanging gentle banter between themselves and with passers-by. Overnight in Leh hotel.

Day 3: Leh and environs for acclimatisation and sightseeing

Drive to Hemis – 45 kms from Leh. Hemis is the largest monastery in Ladakh and home to about 500 monks. The various temples are open to visitors and the imposing giant statue of Buddha in one of the old temples is worth visiting. Recently, a museum has been built and most of the monastery artifacts are displayed here. We then continue to architecturally dominating Thiksey monastery which resembles the Potala palace in Tibet and covers a hillside. The huge 3-storied Maitreya Buddha is housed in one of the temples. The library with its old scriptures is also visited and the rooftop of the monastery offers one of the most beautiful views of the Indus valley and the Stok range of mountains. After visiting the monastery, one can visit the "Amchi" (Tibetan medicine man) who sits in the monastery complex with his array of Tibetan herbal medicines. We have lunch at the monastery restaurant in Thiksey and then go on to Shey which is 5 km away and return to Leh.



After returning we recommend the guided hike to visit Leh Palace, the Old Fort & Tsemo Gompa. A miniature version of the Potala in Lhasa, Leh Palace is one of the major attractions in Ladakh. The palace was built in the 17th century and had nine storeys, but it is now dilapidated and deserted.



It was the home of the royal family until they were exiled to Stok in the 1830s. The palace built for King Singge Namgyal, now houses the Ladakhi branch of the Indian Government's archaeological conservation organisation. After this you will go on to visit Tsemo Gompa. The Namgyal Tsemo Gompa was built in 1430 by King Tashi Namgyal on Namgyal Tsemo Peak overlooking the town. The monastery contains a three-story high solid gold idol of Maitrieya

Buddha (future Buddha also called laughing Buddha) and a one-storied statue of Avaloketesvara and Manjushri along with ancient manuscripts and frescoes.

The fort above this gompa is in ruins, but the views of Leh from here are breathtakingly beautiful. If you are feeling capable after this, you can continue on to Sankar monastery and to the Japanese Peace Pagoda. Overnight in a hotel in Leh.

Day 5: Khardung La Pass (5,605m) and Drive to Chilling (3,200m)

This morning, after an early breakfast, you will take jeeps (39kms / 1.5-2hrs) to Khardungla, the highest motorable road in the world where you will spend some time on the top for acclimatisation purposes (NB: cold winds blast across this point so please take warm clothes). Khardung La, La meaning pass in Tibetan (the local language), is the route between Leh and the Shyok and Nubra valleys. The Khardung La can be termed the gateway to the Karakoram or the land of black gravel. The Siachen Glacier lies partway up the latter valley. Built in 1976, it was opened to motor vehicles in 1988. Maintained by the Indian Army's 14 Corps, the pass is strategically important to India as it is used to carry essential supplies to the Siachen. Khardung La is historically important as it lies on the major caravan route from Leh to Kashgar in Chinese Central Asia. Return to Leh for lunch.

After lunch, drive towards Nimo from where we follow a rough jeep track up to the village of Chilling (3200m). Spend the afternoon visiting the village which is the only one of its kind in Ladakh specialising in metalwork. An excursion can be made to the village of Sumdo also. Just below the camp site the broad Zaskar River flows by at great speed. Overnight camping.



Day 6: Crossing Zanskar River & trek to Skiu (3,344m) 12kms. – 5hrs

This morning rise early from your first night's camping and begin your main trek. You will cross over the Zanskar River and trek to Skiu. The frigid Zanskar River originates from the high altitude plateau of Sarchu on the border of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. Originally known as the Tsarap the river gorges a path out of the rocky mountains of the western Himalayas, dropping in a continuous torrent of class 5 rapids.

The river then eases into the forbidden Kingdom of Zanskar and slowly flows past the capital at Padum. Here it joins with the Stok River which flows down from the Pensi La pass on the road from Kargil to Padum. It is from this confluence of the Tsarap and Stok rivers that the mighty Zanskar takes birth. You will cross the Zanskar River by way of a box and cable bridge and rejoin your trekking team on the opposite riverbank for the trek to Skiu in the Marka Valley. The days trek is on undulating ground with no very high passes.

As you approach the villages you will see the willow trees used for housebuilding and crafts; and the apricot trees, which produce their cash crop each summer. In the fields, which are watered by ancient irrigation channels, a rich barley is grown and cattle and sheep graze. It is an almost idyllic scene. From the camping place at Skiu you should make a point of visiting the nearby monastery and going onto the roof for the splendid views. Elevation at Skiu is 3344m. Overnight camping.

Day 7: Skiu to Markha 21ms 7-8hrs.

Crossing the Markha stream several times, it is a fairly long day's walk of around 7 – 8 hours to the 30 or 40 houses of Markha Village (c.3760m). The trail passes through quite lush vegetation at the riverside, whilst the upper valley-slopes are uniformly brown and dry. En route we pass several more small monasteries, which are often quite difficult to pick out, high on the valley sides. There are also a number of well maintained chortens and prayer walls. On a hill to the north of Markha there is a small gompa which you can visit – 21km . Overnight camping.



Day 8: Markha to Thachungste – 5-6hrs

We continue above Markha Village, trekking eastwards, deeper into the Markha Valley, to a good camping place at Hangkar or continue a little further to Thachungste (4265m). In this high valley we are likely to see small herds of blue sheep (bharal) which often come right down to the river to graze . 5 – 6 hrs. It is possible to visit the Techa gompa high up on a cliff after Markha in which case we can camp at Hangkar or else we will continue to Thachungste. Overnight camping.

Day 9: Trek to Nimaling (4,860m) 8kms - 4 hrs

Leaving Hangkar/ Thachungste, we now have a good view of a prominent snow peak at the head of the valley. This is Kang Yatze, a 6400 metre high mountain which has a subsidiary summit at around 6100 metres. Continue gradually up to the high and wide open meadows of Nimaling (4860m) 4 hrs – 8 km.

Overnight camp.

Day 10: Rest Day

A spare day to take a rest and acclimatisation day in this lovely spot. For the more adventurous, it is possible to go up to the left shoulder of Kangyatse (6100m) and return. Alternatively this day can be used later as a contingency day for the summit attempt on Stok Kangri.

Day 11: To Chukimo (4155m but crossing 5290m) 12 kms 5–6 hrs.

We trek up to the Kongmaru La (5290m) on a well marked trail which zig-zags across scree for the final 250 metres to the pass - 2 hours ascent. From the pass there are views north to the hills of the Eastern Karakoram and China, whilst the southern panorama is dominated by the shapely Kang Yatze. Descending, we enter a narrow gorge to our camping place is at Chukirmo at 4155 metres.



Day 12: To Shan Phu (4365m) 5-6 hrs.

From Chukirmo, we turn towards the west into a tributary valley which leads after a long and gradual ascent to the Gyuncho La at 4700 metres. Descending from the pass, we make camp at Shang Phu at an altitude of 4365 metres.

Day 13: To Gangpoche (4435m.) 6-7 hrs.

Probably the toughest non summit day as we climb 900m today, this part of our route traverses an area which is very rarely visited and involves the crossing of many spurs and minor passes with occasional views northwards towards the Indus Valley and the peaks beyond. Today we climb to cross the Shang La (4960m) and then descend to the Tokpo River for lunch. After lunch we trek generally downhill contouring around spurs

and over a 4550m pass to our camping place at Gangpoche (4435m).

Day 14: To Mankarmo (4380m). 9kms. 4-5 hrs.

Again we have a steady climb in the morning, this time up to the Matho La (4965m). The first views of Stok Kangri (6137m) appears 150m before this pass, where if clear, you see the 8000m Gasherbrum peaks 210 km away in Pakistan controlled Kashmir in the narrow gap in the foreground range to the northwest. At the scenic Mathola pass, you may walk 100m southwest on the ridge top, just past the first small hill and Saloro Kangri comes into view, looking taller as it is on 165 km distant in the Indian controlled Karakoram range (adjacent to the Siachen glacier). and then we descend into the valley to the north of Stok Village. This lovely valley is a high and wild area which is visited only by climbing groups and by the local people who spend some of the summer months in picturesque villages of stone huts, from where they tend their flocks of sheep and goats. Camp near Shepherds huts at Mankarmo(4380m) .

Day 15: Mankarmo to Base Camp (4980m) 4km 2 hrs.

A two hour trek takes us up to the basecamp area for Stok Kangri (Yarlas – 4980m). The very pleasant campsite is on a grassy area beside a meltwater stream. In the afternoon we can walk above our camp for views of the Rimo peaks (adjacent to the Siachen Glacier in the East Karakorams) where the meltwater torrent issues out of the very middle of the Gulap glacier's terminal moraine at 5160m.

Day 16: Trek Mankarmo Valley to Stok Kangri Advanced Base Camp (5,535m) – 4hrs.

After breakfast you will start walking to base camp. Today you will take it slowly as every step is ascending and you are trekking to above 5,000m so will need to take it easy. You will reach base camp for a late lunch and have a rest in the afternoon and the opportunity to sort out your climbing equipment and be shown by our experienced team how to use it. There are nearby ice and snow slopes where you can practice ice axe braking and get used to walking with plastic boots and crampons.
Overnight camping.

Day 17: Summit Stok Kangri (6,114m) – 9-11hrs or

Today is your early morning climb to Stok Kangri and back to Base Camp. At around 3 AM, after a hot drink and snack, you will start trekking to the summit.

Your journey will take 6-7hrs tough trekking to reach the top. Initially your cross glacial deposits and snow fields. It is rough terrain and trying, so be prepared and patient. For this section you will need one or two walking poles. Your ice axe can be carried on your back pack for now. Most important is to keep close to your guide as there are water flows under the ice and you must follow the designated route.



After about two hours the terrain changes to a slightly easier trail of scree, rock and snow as you approach the Ridge.

Around this time you will put on crampons and carry ice axes. Your team will rope up the party as and when they feel it is necessary. The final exposed ridge ascent, while not technical, requires scrambling at 6000m tests even experienced trekkers especially if there has been fresh snow. The views from this ridge and the 6137m summit of Stok Kangri are stunning, as we get views of close valleys and peaks, to, if clear, K2, Broad Peak and other Karakoram peaks to the northwest (340 degrees) 220km distant, Nanga Parbat (above 8000m) 297km distant is a bit more to the west and further west, the closest we see is the towering 7000m peaks of Nun & Kun.

High Camp to the summit is approximately 4 to 5 hrs with the descent back to High camp another 3 hrs. After lunch here we descend further to Base Camp which will take an additional hour.

Day 18: Return Trek to Stok Village and drive to Leh – 5hrs

Finishing our 130km trek we descend to Stok Village at 3610m. The trek down hill to Stok village will take nearly 5hrs. The walk has good views of the valley and you will be following a path beside the stream with plenty of chances to see blue sheep, ibex & marmots. After reaching the summit of Stok Kangri walking down hill to Stok village will be child's play and having been more than around ten days above 3,500m you will have become very fit and should feel as if you can walk for hours as your trek ends. Your vehicles will meet you at the end of the trail and will drive you to Leh (45mins). Once back in Leh you can check into your hotel and have a well deserved hot shower and relax.



Overnight in a hotel in Leh.

Day 19: Fly to Delhi,

This morning you will fly back to Delhi for overnight hotel or onward flight connections.

