

Kingdom of Zanskar Trek, India

An exciting trek over high passes and through impressive gorges - in the kingdom of Zanskar



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Trek
Accommodation	Hotels, camping
Grade	Strenuous
Duration	32 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	On trek: 22 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Mike Ford - Mountain Kingdoms Appointed Leader
Land only	Joining in Delhi, India
Max altitude	5,574m/18,287ft, Phirtse La, Day 10

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



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Departures

Group departures

2025 Dates:

Sat 13 Sep - Tue 14 Oct

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 5 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday. If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your guide



Mike Ford

A frequent leader for Mountain Kingdoms, Mike has been a regular visitor to the Himalaya since his first visit when he crossed the Zoji La from Kashmir into Ladakh. He has worked in Central Asia, northern India, Tibet and Nepal as trek leader and travel writer and once led a four-month expedition over the Greater Himalaya to raise money for primary health care projects in northern India. Mike is a keen photographer, winning a national travel photo competition with a shot taken in central Uzbekistan and has given lectures and slideshows at many adventure travel shows. He was a co-author of the Rough Guides to India and South India for 17 years and has visited every Indian state except the Andamans. Aloo paratha and chai, complete with a Himalayan vista make up his dream breakfast. Mike will be happy to share his knowledge of local Indian and Tibetan culture on this journey, not to mention football and the meaning of life.

Your trip highlights

- A challenging, exciting, off-the-beaten-track trek in true wilderness
- Spectacular gorges, high passes and wild scenery from first step to last
- The dramatic monastery of Phuktal Gumpa clinging to a cliff face
- Time to explore Leh, Manali and Delhi

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-4	Fly to Delhi, at leisure, train to Chandigarh, drive to Manali, rest
Days 5-13	Drive to roadhead, trek to Purne, via Phirtse La
Days 14-19	Visit Phuktal Gumpa, trek to Stongde by crossing the Stongde La pass
Day 20	Visit Padum and drive to Zangla
Days 21-28	Continue the trek, cross the Charcha La Pass, trek through the gorges to Dat
Days 29-30	Drive to Leh, rest
Days 31-32	Fly to Delhi, fly to London

Trip summary

The Kingdom of Zaskar is essentially a valley approximately 100kms long which was, in ancient times, closed off from the outside world by two very high passes. On the approach from Himachal Pradesh, north of the Indian plains, the 'southern pass' was the Shingo La, 5,048m/16,561ft. The 'northern pass' was the Pensi La, 4,400m/14,435ft. Both these passes are snowbound in winter. The kingdom was ruled by two kings, or 'precious rulers', both of Buddhist faith. The main king lived in the small town of Padum, capital of Zaskar, and the second king lived in the village of Zangla. In those days just reaching the kingdom was a major undertaking. It is only in the last 40 years that the Pensi La was opened to jeeps. The Shingo La has only been 'vaguely' open in the last few years.

Mountain Kingdoms MD, Steve Berry, was good friend of the late king of Padum. Steve's father did some mountaineering in 1946 in the region. Therefore, Zaskar was a focus for Mountain Kingdoms in our early years (1987 onwards). We have sought out and developed many off-the-beaten-track treks, avoiding the Shingo La and the Pensi La. This trek, and also our Zaskar Dream Trek, are two of the best treks in the region - they are equally amazing but follow completely different routes.

The Trek

From the heat of Delhi, you will first take a train to Chandigarh from where you will drive to the cooler foothills of the Himalaya. You drive up the Kulu Valley to Manali, surrounded by pine forests, terraced fields and orchards of apple and orange trees. Hinduism is the predominant religion in the valley, although Tibetan refugees have built a fine Buddhist monastery in Manali.

After a rest and a look around Manali and its environs, you drive across the Rohtang Pass, 3,978m/13,051ft, made famous by early explorers. Descending on its northern side into Lahoul, you are surrounded by mountains. At Sarchu you meet your trek staff and horses and set off on foot into the Himalaya. The hardest day is the crossing of the Phirtse La (5,574m/18,287ft), the gateway to Zaskar.

The terrain immediately becomes dramatic and arid as you enter a land of Tibetan Buddhism. The white chortens, mani walls, ghost traps and prayer flags form part of the striking landscape. Western travellers never fail to be affected by it, especially when they meet the friendly local people in their traditional dress. A particularly memorable part of this trek will be your visit to Phuktal Gumpa, a lonely and spectacular monastery clinging to a rock face which exudes the essence of mysticism.

Beyond Phuktal the country is more rugged and you follow deep gorges and cross several high passes and there will be a number of river crossings. There are two extremely remote villages to visit, Tatak and Shade, before you cross the mighty Stongde La Pass, 5,175m/16,978ft, and then drop down to camp next to the ancient monastery that sits above the village of Stongde. Having now arrived near the main township of Padum, you have time to explore before re-starting your trek at Zangla. Next you cross the Charcha La Pass,

4,955m/16,256ft, and enter some of the most spectacular gorges in Ladakh. This is wild uninhabited country and you should see blue sheep, ibex, Himalayan fox and certainly evidence of bears and snow leopard. This is fabulous country with very many river crossings and even 'tunnels' you have to pass through. Eventually you arrive at the largely deserted village of Dat, from where, after an end of trek party, you will drive to the capital of Ladakh, for some R&R.

Steve's view

The original classic trek into the Kingdom of Zaskar crossed the Shingo La Pass and then dropped down into the Lunak Valley, ending eventually at Zaskar's main township of Padum. However, the Indian government (in their infinite wisdom) has pushed jeep tracks from the Manali side towards the Shingo La, and similarly from Padum up the Lunak Valley. Our feeling is that this spoils the pristine nature of this wild and remote trek. We have therefore designed a route to avoid the 'roads' and to regain the magic nature of this long distance trek. We will be following a really off-the-beaten track trail, which is exposed in places, taking you to rarely visited villages, gorges and high passes.

You will need a good head for heights and a keen sense of adventure to undertake this trek! In one or two places the path is so narrow our crew may well have to unload the donkeys/horses to get through. The staff will porter the loads in such cases until the path widens again.

The thing that makes this trek so fantastic is not necessarily the high passes, or the myriad river crossings, or the cliff paths, but the stupendous gorges. They are so gigantic and impressive, just amazing. The remoteness adds to the whole sense of adventure, and the Tibetan Buddhist culture adds to that feeling of 'unreality'.

The prospect of undertaking this journey is at the same time daunting, exciting and challenging. For the explorer in you, it is the stuff to make the adrenalin flow! It is something you will remember for the rest of your life.



Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Fly London to Delhi.

Fly overnight from London to Delhi.

Overnight: In Flight

Day 2: Arrive Delhi. Transfer to hotel. Time at leisure and half day sightseeing tour of Old and New Delhi.

On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel. The rest of the morning is free to relax and recuperate from your long flight.

In the afternoon, there is a half-day sightseeing tour of Old and New Delhi in the company of an English-speaking local guide, to sample the heat, dust, smells, sights and sounds of the frenetic capital of India. Delhi is basically twelve old towns/cities laced together by the new City of Delhi built by the British in the times of the Raj. The sheer size and scale of the old colonial buildings in New Delhi give some idea of the power of British imperialism in India. Many of the old Lutyens/Baker buildings survive to this day. This sightseeing tour will take in some of the old mosques and markets of Old Delhi, along with some of the sights of grand design of New Delhi.

Overnight: Hotel Oberoi Maidens or Similar, Delhi

Day 3: Train to Chandigarh - 3 ½ hours. Drive to Manali, 1,950m/6,400ft - 7 hours.

Early morning you will transfer to the noisy, bustling train station to take the train to Chandigarh. Delhi's train station has been greatly modernised but still there are multiple lines bringing trains in from all over India and as such there is a great deal of hustle and bustle, and an exciting atmosphere.

When you arrive in Chandigarh you will drive by a/c mini bus to the town of Manali via Bilaspur, Mundi and Kulu. Manali lies near the head of the Kulu Valley at 1,950m/6,400ft. It is a popular hill resort for Indians and westerners alike. Manali itself nestles in the foothills barely a dozen miles from the main Himalayan peaks.

Overnight: Mayflower Hotel or Similar, Manali (Meals: BLD)

Day 4: Day at leisure in Manali.

There is plenty to do in Manali. Time can be taken to visit the Hindu temple in the forest above town, visit the bazaar or walk to one of the nearby villages. Also possible is a visit to the large and thriving Tibetan Buddhist monastery, or highly recommended is a visit to the hot spring baths higher up the valley at Vashist; it's your choice whether you walk, or take a taxi. This is all useful rest and acclimatisation after your long journey so far.

Overnight: Mayflower Hotel or Similar, Manali (Meals: BLD)

Day 5: Drive to Keylong, 3,050m/10,006ft - 195km, 6hrs.

The drive towards the roadhead begins by minibus or jeep, crossing over the Rothang La, 3,978m /13,051ft. This pass featured heavily in the early exploration of the western Himalaya and gives excellent panoramic views of glaciers and the high peaks, from here you drop into the region of Lahoul. A picnic lunch is taken at Mahli, 3,405m /11,171ft, 17km before the pass or on the other side of the pass, depending on whether you make an early start or not. The road is narrow and exciting, following the mighty River Chandra for the last 60 km

Overnight: Dekyid Hotel or Similar, Keylong (Meals: BLD)

Day 6: Drive to Sarchu, 4,266m/13,996ft, over the Baralacha La Pass, 4,883m/16,020ft - 103km, 6 hours.

Your journey continues on the Manali-Leh highway and today you will start to see a big change in the landscape as you move into the rain shadow north of the main Himalayan chain. After about an hour, you will reach the settlement of Darcha, which basically consists of an army checkpoint and a small collection of tea huts and shops. This was originally the place where groups used to camp before starting to trek up the Barai Nala to the

Shingo La and into the Zaskar Valley. After some minor checkpoint formalities you continue on your way up to Patseo where there is an army camp. You then start the long ascent of the Baralacha La, 4,883m/16,020ft, which cuts the main Himalayan chain - 3 hours driving. If the weather is good, you should see fine views of the surrounding mountains and the plains around Sarchu. After a long descent you reach Sarchu, where you will meet your crew and camp for the night, near the river.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 7: Trek to Lingti Chu Campsite, 4,392m/14,409ft - 7-8 hours

Today you start trekking and follow the wide Lingti Chu Valley. You will gain stunning views of mountains with beautiful shades of brown and orange. You have your first river crossing today after approximately 30 minutes walking. You therefore will need your river sandals today. After about an hour from camp you come across two strange, large circular depressions in the surface of the plain. They must surely have been caused by meteorite impact. After lunch, you continue past mani walls, which have prayers engraved on them and an old bear trap. You must always keep mani walls and chortens to your right when passing - Tibetan Buddhists believe holy places should be circumambulated in a clockwise direction. All day the main river snakes below you to your right. You are basically crossing the edge of a large plain which is cut occasionally by ravines at the bottom of which are small streams. The position of the campsite will vary according to the availability of water, but is likely to be on a level 'platform' just below the main plain. Plenty of marmots live here.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Trek to river camp called Berga Songchak, 4,450m/14,600ft - approximately 3½ hours.

The rise in altitude from Manali and over the Phirtse La Pass is more rapid than we would normally like, which is why these first three days trek are taken at a very slow pace. Our crew will also be carrying a Gamow bag (recompression chamber) as a precaution in case any member of the party suffers unduly from the altitude. They will also be carrying a bottle of oxygen.

Today for instance is only 3 or 4 hours. An easy day wandering beside and above the river, and a short climb out of camp onto the plateau. After an hour crossing a large grassy 'flat', and after some rocky slopes, you drop down to a mini plateau with a mani wall and an area shepherds have used for cooking. This is Thoyor on the Swiss map. Up, and back onto the main plateau and after a long flat section there are a series of small climbs and dry stream beds. Later there are two actual streams to hop across. Then a final climb to the high point of the day. Looking up the valley you can see tomorrow's river crossing and can begin to see towards the Phirtse La.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Trek to Chumik Marpo, 4,726m/15,505ft - approximately 6 hours.

You head up the river on the 'plateau' until you come to the major river crossing at Khamirap. The water here may even be waist deep and perhaps one of the horses could be used for this crossing. A huge flat plain follows until you reach a 'gorge'. Not really a gorge but a steep sided valley with scree and sun baked rocks. The path is on the left bank sometimes high above the river until a 'corner' where you will cross to the right bank. It is still a long way to go, up and down, but slowly gaining height. After the 'corner' the valley widens and there are beautiful views of the silver river snaking ahead. Camp on a rocky meadow next to the river. You may pass Zanskari nomadic settlements today. Look out for tents, stone walls and yaks grazing. You may be able to sample some of their delicious fresh curd in exchange for tea and biscuits.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Cross the Phirtse La, 5,574m/18,287ft. Descend to Zingchan, 4,606m/15,111ft - approximately 9-10 hours.

This is a long, long day but a really rewarding one! It is an easy and gradual ascent to the pass, in and out of valleys, two river crossings, and rising traverses. Higher up there are pretty blue flowers and hard mosses that look just like coral. So hard in fact you can stand on them. It takes about 4½ hours to reach the pass, incredible views. Then after hugs all round and shouts of "so so la gyelo" (victory to the gods), you start the descent on moderately steep unpleasant scree until a rocky path leads down the obvious valley towards the edge of Zaskar.

Camp is at Zinchan which is set like an indented table on the mountainside.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Trek to Testa, 3,950m/12,959ft) - approximately 4-5 hours.

Today is an easier day, with fantastic scenery along the way. There is a short uphill slope out of camp to gain a path that contours easily around the mountainside. After 2 - 2½ hours you come to the 'Toden La' pass. Not really a pass, but the end of the traverse and the start of the descent into a fantastic gorge which eventually spits you out into the main Zanskar valley. First though, before descending into the gorge you will be drinking in your first views of Zanskar. Near the 'pass' there is a group of orange coloured cliff tops from where you can look down into the Lunak valley. Below you can see the fields and houses of Table, up the valley you can almost see the village of Kargiak, and down the valley are the pretty villages of Tangzen, Kuru and Testa. Beautiful yellows from the barley and splashes of green from the carefully irrigated fields add exquisite colour to a dramatic backdrop of brown, copper and grey mountains. You trek down through the gorge, with its beetling cliffs and a short way down the valley to Tangzen for lunch. People will be working in the fields here collecting the harvest. After lunch, cross the river on a girder bridge and take the long rising traverse to Kuru. Wonderful Tibetan style houses here. A short stretch brings you to the larger village of Testa. Your campsite may be next to a group of chortens, and a grove of willows. There is plenty of opportunity for interaction with the Zanskari people today.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Trek to Purne, 3,846m/12,618ft - 3 hours.

Today is a glorious day's walking with lots of cultural interest as you pass through the villages, watching the families working the fields, harvesting the barley and peas. The freshly-picked peas are absolutely delicious! Make sure you have plenty of digital cards in your day sack today for the many photo opportunities. A steep dusty descent takes you to a further bridge which you cross to reach your campsite at Purne. There are a couple of shops in Purne selling soft drinks, chocolate and a few other items. You may wish to trek to another lovely campsite at Kang Sar, a small hamlet in the direction of Phuktal.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 13: Rest day.

A welcome day to rest, potter around, and do some laundry. You could also turn the mess tent into a bath house and take turns with buckets of warm water.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 14: Purne to Phuktal Gompa, 3,895m/12,779ft - 2 hours.

You walk up a very deep and impressive gorge with a fast-flowing river to this remarkable and remote monastery. The great gorge has cliffs of rich red rock where millions of years previously large chunks had fallen down. These great orange blocks are scattered on the floor of the gorge. The path is sometimes sensational, built into the sides of cliffs. The occasional lama may pass you by. The 500 year old gompa is built literally on the side of a cliff. Here you can visit the inner temples.

Phuktal Gompa

This is one of the most famous monasteries in Zanskar and is about five hundred years old. The monastery is like a honeycomb cut into a rock under a gigantic grotto, and is of the "yellow hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The name means 'through cave'. There is a story here that a few hundred years ago a Kashmiri robber attempted to break into the monastery (the monks had gone away to visit a festival) and the caretaker monk had locked the door. Failing to gain entry, the robber lowered himself on a rope down the cliff above the monastery and tried to swing into the cave. The rope somehow got caught round his head and his head came off. Apparently, the dried head is kept in the temple and brought out once a year to celebrate the victory of the guardian deity of the monastery. In the cave above the monastery there is a waterhole whose level never changes and it is said to have healing properties. There is also a stone tablet left by the Hungarian explorer, Alexander Csoma de Körös. He was one of the first explorers of Tibet and spent some time here in 1826-27.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 15: Trek to Yaytah, 4,036m/13,241ft - 6 to 7 hours.

A great day! One final look around Phuktal Gompa and then find your way through the bowels of the monastery to the path that heads onwards to Tantak, Shade and the Stongde La. It is quite a deceptive climb up the slope to a chorten that marks the rim of cliffs above Phuktal. Then there is 3 hours of impressive gorge trekking. After an hour you will see a huge stratified cliff on your right, another hour brings you to a memorable contorted cliff and 40 minutes on there are some impressive cliffs that rock climbers would drool over. 20 minutes from here is an enormous scree slope that has a good path but even so it takes 15 minutes to cross. Lunch and then cross a small new bridge followed by a cruel 40 minute climb to a 'pass'. 20 minutes down from here is the improbable camp of Yaytah. It comprises a series of tent platforms engineered from the hillside. The cruel climb might be avoided once the main path around the cliffs, above the river has been repaired.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 16: Trek to Tantak, 3,961m/12,995ft - 6 hours.

As you approach Sumdo, the path can be exposed in places and a head for heights is an asset here. At Sumdo itself, there is a magnificent traditional Ladakhi bridge (the Niri bridge). Not easily seen from the path. This is made entirely of interwoven birch twigs and spans the ravine in a huge arc. This kind of bridge used to exist in many parts of Ladakh, but over the last 50 years have slowly but surely been replaced with more modern steel cable bridges or girder bridges. However, this is in such a remote locality and is so rarely used that it has remained intact. Steve Berry, our MD, says as far as he knows, it is one of only four left in existence in Ladakh.

Descending from camp you quickly hit the main path. From camp it is about an hour to arrive above the Niri bridge. It can be seen before this but you have to look carefully. We do not recommend that you try descending to the bridge as the path down is very 'hairy'. From here there are some bits of path on narrow ledges. The cliffs and gorges just go on being amazing. After the 'difficult' bits there is a section where the river lies at the bottom of a box canyon. 40 minutes from the Niri bridge is a new wooden bridge next to which is a large unusual square boulder. An hour from here contouring on the right bank you come to a beautiful cantilevered wooden bridge with an engineered path beyond. You may take lunch here. It is then an hour to camp. The valley widens, the floor is flat, the river braids, and there is a lot of stunted birch. Camp is near here and before Tantak which can be seen ahead.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 17: Trek to beyond Jingchikmo, 4,094m/14,432ft - approximately 6 hours. Possible side trip to Shade - 2-3 hours.

25 minutes to Tantak - a small hamlet of only 3 or 4 houses plus a gompa, This small monastery comes under the patronage of Phuktal. A monk visits one per month. The hamlet sits astride a small hill overlooking its fields. You now drop down from Tantak through fields and a shrub covered plain to an old wall. Just above this is an old hermit's nest in some cliffs. This marks the start of a huge gorge in the bottom of which is a deep, perfect box canyon. At the start of the gorge are the 'lhatoos' or spirit shrines, and a chorten. A few minutes later you come to an incredible side canyon, a narrow slot with impressive rock walls, two lhatoos and a triple chorten. A path from here leads up the side canyon to the unbelievably remote village of Shade. 1 hour up, ½ hour back. It is worth the visit for those with energy to burn.

Back at the side canyon there is a traditional bridge made improbably with boughs of wood and stone. Just a small thing over a huge chasm. Half an hour beyond is a river crossing and 45 minutes beyond you come to an amazing side canyon of cliffs and spires. Great slabs of overlapping rock walls culminating in a peak high above. Next to this monster crag is a line of eroded cliffs and pinnacles. Pigeons play acrobatics, and a stream tinkles in the bottom. The camp is in fact beyond Jingchikmo as there is no water there.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 18: Trek to Suslan Taktak at the base of Stongde La Pass.

A very exciting day! There are at least 13 or 14 river crossings. You wander up the river bed through thickets of stunted willow and silver birch. Before this though there is an hour of long gradual contouring to reach the Sringri La Pass (Niri La), not really a pass but the cutting of a corner. Everywhere today has endless amazing cliffs and mountains. The river crossings change year on year as the river is bound to change its course in the summer.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 19: Cross the Stongde La, 5,175m/16,978ft, and descend to Stongde, 3,846m/12,618ft - 9 hours.

15 minutes from camp you start the long gradual climb to the Stongde La. In the first hour you pass above a fabulous box canyon, heading towards a huge pointed rock peak not even marked on the Swiss map. At the end of two hours you come to the only river crossing of the day. You may be able to boulder hop this rushing torrent. There is a small stone hut on the opposite bank. Then it is engage auto pilot and head slowly for the pass, 5½ hours from camp, and should see emotional celebrations as you realise there are no more false summits. The views are tremendous and actually you can see Stongde Gompa far below, but it is still 3½ hours to reach camp. On the way down you pass some summer pasture where you might meet local women making yak cheese.

The village of Stongde is a river oasis with a monastery enthroned above it, and it sits above the main Zanskar Valley. The monastery is affiliated to the Yellow Hat sect or Gelugkpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It is said to have been founded by Naropa's disciple, Marpa, in the 11th century and taken over by the Gelugkpa some four centuries later. It is a well-maintained and flourishing place with no fewer than seven temples and is well known for its paintings of rare beauty and delicacy. These include an unusual series in which the figures and deities are outlined in gold on a black background. It also houses a rare antique British Horse Artillery helmet dating from around 1820, No one seems to know how it came to be at the monastery.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 20: Drive to Padum. Drive to Zangla, 3,442m/11,293ft.

It does not take long to drive by jeep to the main township of Zanskar, Padum, perhaps half an hour or so. It's an interesting place to wander around with a small Buddhist monastery on top of the small hill above the town. This is where the kings of Zanskar had a fortress before Zowara Singh invaded from Kashmir and knocked it down. There are good views to be had from here. You may also walk to another temple called Pipiting, which is just outside of Padum on the other side of the valley.

After you've thoroughly explored, you drive back to near the village of Zangla. The camp will have been moved and will be set up somewhere on the plain below Zangla, near the river.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 21: Trek to Sumdo before Charcha La Base, 3,834m/12,579ft - 6 hours.

The walk to Zangla is not so far, 20-25 minutes or so, and from here the path leads up and past the old castle, which is perched high above the village on a buttress of rock. It is in a dilapidated condition, but some Hungarian archaeologists have been attempting some renovation in recent years. The famous explorer Alexander Csoma de Körös had lived in the castle during his time in Zanskar. It may even be possible to look inside if anyone can be found with the key.

It is then 20 minutes easy traverse from the castle towards the gorge due east to an irrigation channel which you follow for half an hour to where the gorge proper starts. At the very beginning of the gorge is a huge fin of rock on top of which you can clearly see the remains of an even more ancient fortress. It is such an improbable place to have a castle - who built it and why? It really is an astounding feat of building, and very mysterious. This place marks the beginning of the gorge. Really, we have run out of superlatives to describe the next 3½ hours. Firstly, you will need to put on river crossing sandals, as you will be wading the river many times today. In between crossings, you just continue to walk in your river sandals, as it would be completely impractical to swap from trekking boots to river sandals every time you cross the stream. It is therefore important to have a comfortable pair of river sandals. You will cross the small river maybe 20 or 30 times. However, it is never deeper than the knees (or at least that was the case in 2009 and 2013 when Steve did this section of the route). Watch out for small fish, like minnows, in small side pools.

This section is constantly exciting with non-stop breathtaking cliffs and contorted mountain strata. Thrown in are the unusual and the bizarre - thin fins of rock, giant slabs arching heavenwards, narrow passages with cliffs thousands of feet high above and caves high up in the rock walls, and different types and colours of rock. It is in fact an easy hike, though rocky underfoot, and great care is needed. Somewhere you will stop in the shade in the gorge for a quick lunch. Near the end of the path up the gorge, you rise to a natural cleft and shortly after that you are spat out and come to a river junction. This is a lovely place with stunted willows and a delightful camp site. By the way, the river flowing down the gorge is the Zumlung Chu. You could camp half an hour further up, which would afford you a better start tomorrow, but there is probably better grazing for your horses/mules at the first camp

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 22: Cross the Charcha La, 4,955m/16,256ft and trek to Chupchak, 4,476m/14,685ft - 8-9 hours.

A big day and an early start. If you camp lower down, then it is half an hour up to the upper camp site where you turn right and start climbing steeply up to another flat area called Charcha La Base. This is a good, flat area and would be good for camping except that there is no water and nothing for the horses to graze on. If you get up early, then the sun does not hit you until after this, so you make good height gain in the shade. Then the path becomes a series of zigzags across and up steep scree. The pass and its chorten can be seen from a long way, and the path up to it looks improbable, but it does exist! After the scree, you start up a rocky area and care is needed. Achieving the pass can be quite an emotional experience! Again there are evocative views of wild remote mountain country. Then it is off easily down and following a riverbed, which is dry to begin with. There may even be patches of snow. The stony path leads down into a deepening gorge and the small stream is squeezed into a series of 'tunnels'. Not really tunnels but a number of narrow clefts. You simply follow the stream. Very exciting. It then widens out a bit before you come to a place where it is only a few feet wide for 100 yards or so. If the water levels are really low, you may even manage to boulder-hop all the way through, or you may need to do some shallow wading. Thereafter, the difficulties are over and you continue wearily down to a sumdo (junction) to camp. This place is called Chupchak, but is wrongly marked on some maps. The crossing of the pass is a fine achievement.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 23: Trek to Tomto, 3,926m/12,880ft - 7-8 hours.

Chupchak is shown wrongly on the 1/150,000 map by Olizan (the best map currently available) and we believe it is at the first major sumdo after the Charcha La Pass, not at the right-angled bend, considerably further on. It is two hours' walk down to the right-angled bend where there is a big junction and you turn right. At this junction you will need to put on your river sandals again and stay in them all day as there are many river crossings. You are following down the Zumling Chu River and as the day wears on the gorge becomes more and more impressive. It is rough, stony ground, so concentration is needed. It is a tiring day and although you may come across possible camp sites, it is best to press on to a final camp at Tomto. Opposite there is a side valley, at the end of which is an interesting-looking big snow peak.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 24: Trek to Nyari Nyarsang, 3,764m/12,349ft - 6-7 hours.

A shorter but still fantastic day! If it's possible, this may even be the best day for gorge scenery. At one point the gorge gets narrower and narrower and the leviathan cliffs rise straight out of the earth in Titanic twisted slabs. There are river crossings the whole way so, again, river sandals needed. There are astonishing upturned strata hundreds of feet high, rich colours, even in one place bright red rock, a real powerhouse of nature, a complete wonderland. It is about 5 hours to walk down to Tilat Sumdo. Wading through the various river crossings is a cold shock straight after breakfast. The scenery makes up for it, and Tilat Sumdo is a particularly impressive junction and you may see snow leopard tracks in the trail dust. After Tilat Sumdo the river is a bit deeper, faster and wider, but still should only be just above knee level, all things being equal. Then, after some incredible boiler plate slabs, you suddenly come to camp at Nyari Nyarsang (Karna Sumdo on some maps). This is a lovely spot at a junction with a side valley and stunted willows give some shade. However, it is a very dusty camp site. You will appreciate the rest, and the chance to relax and possibly have showers in the mess tent.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 25: Rest day.

You will certainly appreciate some rest and recuperation. Time again for washing and personal admin. This day is also a useful 'buffer' to adjust for the unexpected.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 26: Trek to Lapurba following the river, approximately 3,800m/12,500ft - 6-7 hours.

The next two days involve more superlative gorges and impressive cliff scenery. In places there are the remains of an old path but you will very often find it is easier to just walk up the river bed.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 27: Trek to Tantse - 6 hours. Alternatively cross the Zalong Karpo La and continue to Tsokra.

It is a very pleasant walk to Tantse. There are again 25 or so river crossings. The valley is more open with lots of trees and bushes.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 28: Trek to Dat, 4,338m/14,232ft - 4 hours.

Tantse is a stunningly beautiful place. There are some gigantic slabs of rock to the south with evidence of a colossal rock fall in relatively recent times. Tantse lies at the junction of two major valleys. The left fork leads to the Zalong Karpo La Pass via Tsokra, and the right leads to Dat. The valley floor is very green with much stunted willow and evidence of human habitation. In ancient times there was a real life shangrila kingdom here, locked off from the outside world. There is in fact a large castle at Tsokra.

In less than an hour you come to 3 remarkable rock peaks and a natural stone arch that sit as guardians to the narrow entrance of a canyon beyond. You enter this canyon marvelling at the massive rock walls. After 30 minutes this widens and there are a number of ruined houses and disused fields. You then come to a huge Lhato (spirit shrine) and beyond that three huge cliffs. As you finally leave the valley and approach the village of Dat there is line after line of ancient mani walls. This must have been an impressive entrance hundreds of years ago to this unknown kingdom. Dat is a large village with fine houses and a monastery, but sadly now it is only used in the winter.

No doubt this will be an appropriate time to have a party and celebrate your adventures and grand achievement! No doubt the first bottles of beer for some long time will be very welcome.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 29: Drive to Leh, 3,500m/11,500ft - 6-7 hours.

Although it will seem strange to be in a vehicle after so long on trek nevertheless it is an interesting journey over the Tanglung La Pass, 5,328m/17,480ft, finally dropping down into the Indus valley. Baths and beers await you.

Overnight: Ladakh Residency Hotel or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 30: At leisure in Leh.

Today is free to shop and explore Leh. It is a fascinating town dominated by the old royal palace. The old part of town has bazaars and narrow back streets and there is bags of atmosphere.

Overnight: Ladakh Residency Hotel or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 31: Fly from Leh to Delhi.

The flight over the top of the Himalaya is sensational. On a clear day you can see K2 and the Karakoram giants. You may even be able to pick out some of the route you have just achieved. Your hotel room will be available after mid day. The rest of the day is at leisure.

Overnight: Hotel Oberoi Maidens or Similar, Delhi (Meals: B)

Day 32: Fly to London.

You will have your hotel room until mid-day before transferring to the airport to fly to Delhi and onwards to London. (Meals: B)

Our grading system

Kingdom of Zanskar is graded as a Strenuous trekking holiday, as described below.

Strenuous

Our strenuous trekking holidays can involve anything from 10 to 30 days on trek and are often in remote areas, far from 'civilisation'. Rest days are interspersed but there may be up to 7 consecutive days of hard walking. Most treks reach altitudes of at least 4,900m/16,000ft and there will be a great deal of ascent and descent. The majority of our strenuous treks utilise camping, tea house or mountain lodge accommodation.

These holidays are suitable for fit individuals who have regular experience of mountain walking.

Trip altitude

Important - please be aware that this trip involves travel at altitude. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip are likely to experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend www.medex.org.uk as a good source of information.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ 30 x breakfasts, 28 x lunches, 28 x dinners
- ✓ Good standard 4* hotel accommodation in Delhi, bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Best available hotels in outlying towns on full board basis
- ✓ Full service camping
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK (flight inclusive option)
- ✓ UK Departure Tax
- ✓ All trains and drives and hotel/airport transfers
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Costs of all portage or horses/mules and their insurance
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Carbon offset for clients taking our flight-inclusive option
- ✓ A free high-quality Mountain Kingdoms kit bag

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- × Travel insurance
- × Indian visa fee
- × Lunch and evening meals in Delhi
- × Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit [For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>](https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign).

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.



Hotel Oberoi Maidens or Similar, Delhi

We normally use the Hotel Oberoi Maidens. This is a 50 room, 4* colonial style hotel built in the time of the Raj, and has a great cavalry bar, historic dining room, friendly breakfast room / coffee shop, and a large outdoor swimming pool. We will book this if at all possible but subject to availability we may also use the Hotel Metropolitan or Claridges.



Mayflower Hotel or Similar, Manali

Manali - You stay at the Mayflower Hotel - our favourite hotel in Manali. Large comfortable en-suite rooms. It features lots of pine cladding, lovely verandahs, log fires and excellent food and service. A comparatively quiet location being at the top end of town and up the hill, backing onto forest.



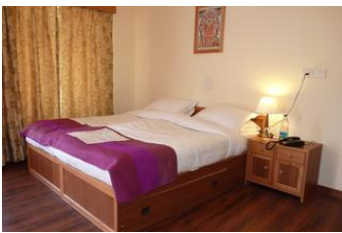
Dekyid Hotel or Similar, Keylong

We will use the Dekyid Hotel which is a small basic hotel in this small town.



Camp

On trek we provide a mess tent, table and chairs, kitchen tent, toilet tent, 2 person sleeping tents and sleeping mattresses, a Sirdar (local guide), cook and camp staff.



Ladakh Residency or Similar, Leh

We stay at the very pleasant Ladakh Residency. This is one of the best hotels in Leh with 23 en-suite rooms, decorated and furnished in traditional style.

Meal arrangements

30 x breakfasts, 28 x lunches, 28 x dinners.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

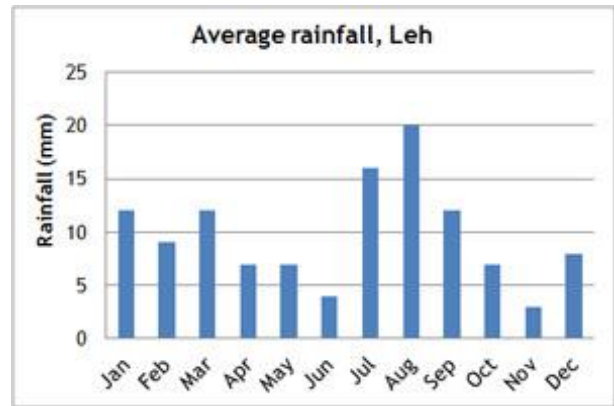
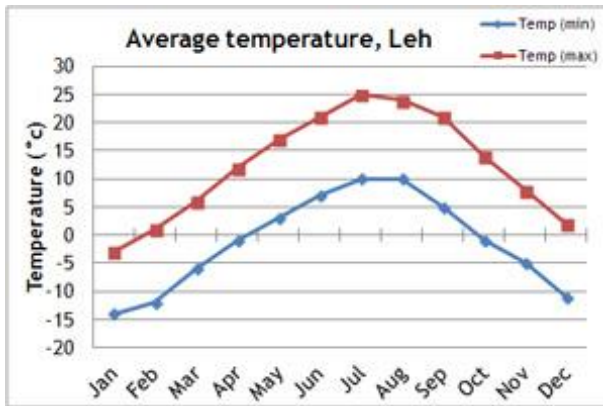
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at www.mountainkingdoms.com.



Additional accommodation in Delhi

If you would like to stay longer in Delhi we can arrange additional nights and upgrades from our selection of first rate hotels such as the Oberoi Maidens in the city or Claridges Hotel in New Delhi.

Agra, Taj Mahal & Jaipur

We offer various extensions to Agra, from a one-day visit to see the majestic Taj Mahal to a six-day trip to visit both the Taj and the Amber Fort at Jaipur. All options travel to Agra on the Shatabdi Express and include the services of an English speaking guide, sightseeing and private transport.



Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- This trek was designed by MD, Steve Berry, based on his many years' experience of trekking in the Indian Himalaya, and is unique to Mountain Kingdoms
- You will have a Mountain Kingdoms appointed trek leader who will be assisted by an experienced local guide and trek crew
- We have built in time for acclimatisation/rest and enjoyment
- We use daily non-stop flights from London to Delhi
- We use the best camping equipment available - modern dome tents for sleeping and good quality mess tent, toilet tent and kitchen tent.
- We use carefully chosen 4* hotels in Delhi and the best hotels elsewhere
- Domestic flights and all meals in Ladakh are included in the cost of the holiday.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights Manager, April, for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

What our clients say



I am very excited to be offering this route, it is certainly challenging, but the memories will stay with you for a lifetime!
-Steve Berry, MK Managing Director

I was also very serious about my gratitude to all, and to you especially - it was my best trek ever. - Mr P. J. (Birmingham)

It was a truly wonderful trek; on another of your memorable adventures. Thanks to you and your team. In many respects, one of the best treks I have been on - an adventure! - Mr S, Norfolk

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

