

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard

Destination: Ladakh, India

Season: mid November – mid March



Expert local snow leopard spotters and your own camping team throughout



Standard group tour itinerary includes 9 full days of snow leopard tracking



Options to experience local homestays when in Hemis NP or Uley Valley



90% Sighting success of snow leopards in the wild from previous tours



Your own base camp station inside the heart of snow leopard country

Dates:

Next group tour: 28th Feb – 15th Mar 2020

Private / Tailored Tour information:

This tour can be booked anytime between the middle of November and the middle of March (this is the breeding season of snow leopards and when they are more active), (subject to availability).

Whilst we have a good success rate in filling tours we always suggest booking a private tour to avoid any disappointment.

The costs for a minimum of 2 passengers (to have a private tour) are listed alongside the small group price (based on a minimum of 4 passengers). If you are interested in a quote for a solo private tour or would like to know the discounted rates for a group of 6 or more please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

We also have flexibility for the duration of trip you would like to book.

Some of our clients prefer to book longer trips and so we have options for 20 night and 25 night tours for solo travellers, the prices for these options are listed parallel.

Trips for any group size and any duration are possible, please enquire further for more information on our tailored snow leopard tours.

For our tailored tours of longer durations (20 and 25 nights) the extra nights are taken in Hemis NP or other snow leopard watching locations. So the extra days are a direct reflection of the extra time spend looking for snow leopards.

Prices (2020 season):

Group Tour (16 nights)

£3,445 per person

*single supplement £325

Private Tour (16 nights)

£4,550 for a solo traveller

£3,850 per person (2 people)

Private Tour (20 nights)

£4,995 for a solo traveller

£4,585 per person (2 people)

Private Tour (24 nights)

£5,845 for a solo traveller

£4,900 per person (2 people)

Overview

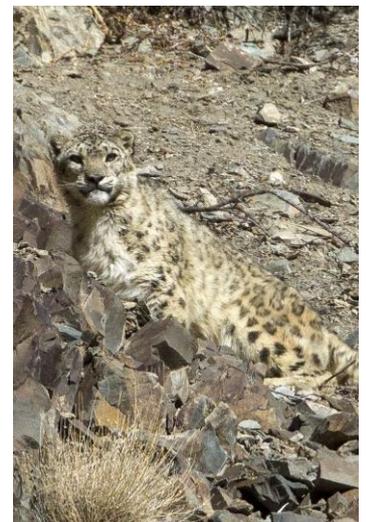
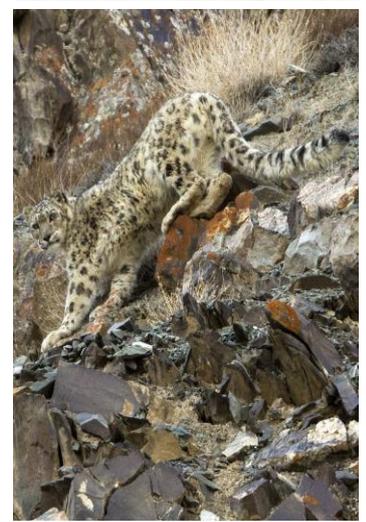
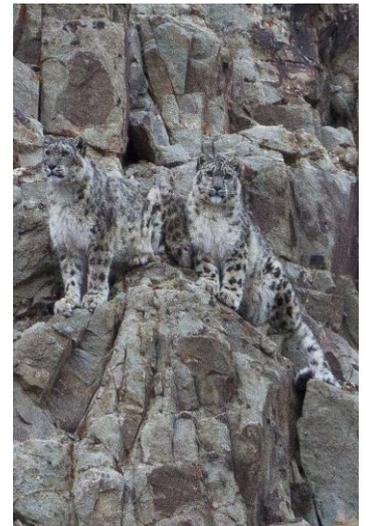
Day 1: Delhi

Day 2/4: Leh

Day 5/14: Hemis NP

Day 15/16: Delhi

Day 17: Home





Tour Information

Introduction

At first glance the vastness of the landscape and seeming inaccessibility of the Himalayas will combine to frustrate anyone hoping to see a snow leopard, but you have to remember that this is far from a lifeless environment, despite what it may appear like at first glance. The Snow Leopard is the ultimate predator here and they take their place at the top a diverse food web with many species inhabiting in this inhospitable habitat.

This trek will introduce you to the local culture and customs of this Buddhist area and along with the hardy wildlife, and you will have the privilege of meeting many Ladahki people as they go about their business in this harsh environment. It is with the help of the local shepherds and pony men here that we will find snow leopards and it is cooperation like this which is vital for the continued conservation of snow leopards. This is achieved by a shift in attitude towards the predator; many local people now see the snow leopard as a source of income through providing home-stays and portage for wildlife enthusiasts like you. This has elevated the snow leopard from pest to resource and helps to protect the species from persecution. Whilst on the trek, our search may look random and the valleys may all look the same; but we focus our search in a few areas where the snow leopards' prey aggregate in the winter. The valleys south of the Indus River in Hemis National Park are famous for its snow leopard research and nearly all wild snow leopard video footage has been filmed here, surely making this the best place to see wild snow leopards in the world. In addition to being in the right place at the right time of year we will have the help of a local naturalist expert who has years of experience in tracking snow leopards.

But by far the most important resource we have is the information we collect from local people who live in the presence of snow leopards year around. It is by staying with the villagers in home-stays and working closely with the shepherds that we will gain a picture of the snow leopard activity. Below we have outlined a detailed itinerary for the entire trip. However due to weather conditions the route and activities may vary once we get there, although we will endeavour to stick to the stated itinerary as much as possible. The most obvious deviation from the itinerary will come if a snow leopard has been spotted recently somewhere in which case we will head off in pursuit and not necessarily adhere to the outlined route.

We have great success in our snow leopard tours and since 2011 we have not failed to see snow leopards on our trips travelling in the peak season (February – March), in fact in the last 9 trips we have seen over 2 individual snow leopards and in March 2014 we had over 50 hours of sightings including 2 male fighting over mating rites, a mother and cub, attempted hunts and also the first time mating snow leopards has been seen and filmed at close quarters. You can see the incredible pictures taken from this trip on one of our clients (Mr. John Oates) Flickr pages (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnswildlifephotos/sets/72157642780737593>) and also the BBC aired footage of this encounter as they were filming for *Planet Earth 2* during this trip.

A brief summary of the sightings from the last 11 trips are:

- **Feb-Mar 2019 (2)** - Numerous sightings, including mother and cubs and one sighting at a distance of just 35m
- **Feb 2019 (1)** - 2 sightings including a mother and cubs
- **Feb-Mar 2018 (3)** – Numerous sightings including hunting and playing. Videos available - <https://youtu.be/lhrQCFe44lg> and <https://youtu.be/rcQ88Z9hqp4>
- **Feb-Mar 2018 (2)** – 2 sightings, including one within 25m of our client.
- **Feb 2018 (1)** - 8 sightings of various different snow leopards, including one close sighting around 40m away – the photographs are due to be published by renowned wildlife photographer Jean-Marie Seveno who was our client on this trip.
- **Feb 2017 (2)** – 3 snow leopards seen, including one just 35m away.
- **Feb 2017 (1)** – 2 snow leopards seen and photographed.
- **Feb 2016** – 3 snow leopards seen throughout the trip. Including one just 25m away.
- **Feb-Mar 2015** – 2 cats seen, one around 75m away for over 30 minutes Mar 2014 – 4 cats seen, one mother and cubs sometimes less than 50m away, they were seen on 7 of the 10 days in the field. Also 4 seen at once (first time this has ever happened in history), mating, hunting and fighting all observed – the pictures on the above link are from this tour
- **Feb-Mar 2013** – 4 cats seen, including a mother and 2 cubs right above the camp (around 80m distance) for over 1 hour
- **Nov-Dec 2012** – 3 cats seen, including one sunbathing for over 2 hours and one starting a hunt

We have seen snow leopards on 90% of our trips and have high hopes of increasing this percentage in the future.



Itinerary

Day 1 **Delhi**

Arrival & Day of Rest

Accommodation:

Shanti Home
(Boutique) /
Holiday Inn (3*)

Food:

No meals included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle.

On your arrival you be met by your local guide and driver and then taken to your hotel, depending on your arrival time you will either stay at the airport (if your flight is an evening or night arrival) or in the city itself (if your flight is a morning or early afternoon arrival) as your flight out to Leh will be scheduled for the morning tomorrow.

Day 2 **Leh, Ladakh**

Fly from Delhi – Leh & Day of Rest

Accommodation:

Hotel Omasila
A-Category Hotel

Food:

Breakfast will be served in the hotel, lunch will be taken on arrival in Leh and your welcome to Ladakh meal will be at your accommodation.

Transportation:

Private vehicles &
Internal flight.

This morning you will be taken to the airport to catch your flight north to Leh, the capital of Ladakh. Once in Leh you will be met by your local guide who will transfer you to your accommodation for your first taste of life in the North West of India. Your hotel is the famous Hotel Omasila, located centrally in Leh the views of the Himalayas are just exquisite. The terraces give you a panoramic view of the area and we strongly recommend having a refreshing drink up here whilst acclimatizing. The next couple of days are important to acclimatise to the altitude before heading out into Hemis (for private tours and people who are used to altitude we can remove these days if you wish).

Days 3-4 **Leh, Ladakh**

Sightseeing

Accommodation:

Hotel Omasila
A-Category Hotel

Food:

All of your meals will be served at the accommodation in between excursions to various sites.

Transportation:

Private vehicle &
Walking.

For the next two days your local guide will take to various places in and around Leh as your body gets used to the altitude. Some places you may be taken include the local market where goods produced in Kashmir such as dried apricots and almonds are for sale as well as the imposing Leh Palace. Overlooking the town it is based on the iconic Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet. A good climb to get your body going is up to Shanti Stupa which offers great views out over the town and the mountains all around.

Day 5 **Hemis National Park**

Trekking / Snow Leopard Tracking

Accommodation:

Trekking camp –
double A-shape
Alpine tents

Food:

Breakfast will be served at the hotel before departure. Your lunch and dinner will be provided by the camp cook at base camp.

Transportation:

Private vehicle &
Walking.

This morning after breakfast you will drive along the Indus River and climb in height as you head towards the entrance of Hemis National Park. Along the way you will pick up your camping team and then at the entrance to the park your pony man will load up the ponies with the camp gear and you will head into the park with your snow leopard spotter. The trek to the base camp site is around 1 – 1.5 hours and along the way your spotter will be looking out for snow leopards. On arrival the camp will be constructed and you will set about (with your spotter) trying to find a snow leopard straight away.



Days 6-13 Hemis NP / Uley Valley

Trekking and Snow Leopard Tracking

Accommodation:

Camp – double A-shape Alpine tents / Homestay

Food:

Breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided by the camp cook at base camp.

Transportation:

Walking

For the next 8 full days you will be spotting snow leopards. The exact routine each day is completely dependant on what snow leopard activity there is on a day to day basis. Your spotter will head out whilst you have breakfast to try and find evidence of snow leopards and decide where is best to start our spotting.

The walks from the base camp to the chosen spotting ridge (there are a number of ridge lines that offer very good views over large areas of commonly used snow leopard trails), will take between 30 minutes and 2 hours on average. Once you arrive at the ridge you will spend the time spotting by scanning your scope or binoculars looking to the tell tale signs of snow leopards. This may seem futile with the vastness of the mountainsides but your spotter has a sixth sense and they also know the movements of the snow leopards and here they are most likely to be.

As well as snow leopards there is a range of other wildlife that can be seen here including blue sheep, golden eagles, Himalayan griffon, lammergeyer, Siberian ibex (Uley only), various species of pika, red fox, Tibetan wolves, stone martens, mountain weasel, woolly hare among others. Your local guide will do their best to spot these animals as well.

We can also leave the base camp in Hemis and go to the nearby village of Rumbak, here you are able to have a homestay for as many nights as you wish. We can also leave Hemis altogether and travel to Uley Valley, this is another location with very good snow leopard sightings. Also here (and strangely absent from Hemis) are the spectacular Siberian ibex, this is a good chance to stay in a homestay too. Most people choose to stay at the base camp in Hemis until they have seen snow leopards and then choose to see the ibex and experience a homestay (not to mention sleeping in a comfortable bed).

Day 14 Leh

Travelling & Leisure

Accommodation:

Hotel Omasila
A-Category Hotel

Food:

Breakfast will be served at the camp with lunch and dinner in Leh at the hotel.

Transportation:

Walking & Private vehicle.

This morning is your last chance to see a snow leopard as the camp is being packed up and the ponies being loaded up. You will then hike back to the entrance of the park and get into the waiting vehicle. Along the way you will drop off your camping team and head back to the hotel. On your arrival at the hotel you will have the rest of the day to relax, enjoy the hot showers, soft beds and refreshing beers, which are usually the first things people go for on arrival!

Day 15 Delhi

Travelling & Leisure

Accommodation:

Shanti Home
(Boutique hotel)

Food:

Breakfast will be at the hotel in Leh no other meals are included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicles & Internal flight.

After breakfast this morning you will be transferred to the airport in time to catch the flight back to Delhi. On arrival in Delhi you will be met and transferred to your hotel, the rest of the day is for you to do as you please.

Day 16 Delhi

Sightseeing of Old & New Delhi

Accommodation:

Shanti Home
(Boutique hotel)

Food:

Breakfast at the hotel is the only meal included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & Walking.

Because the flights to and from Leh can be cancelled for winter storms in the Himalayas (however this is a very rare event) we like to have a buffer day here at the end of the trip, so that if on day 15 your flight is cancelled you can spend the night in Leh and not miss your flight home the next day (however for private tours we can skip this day if you wish). For the day in Delhi you will be taken on a full day sightseeing trip, some of the places you could visit include Red Fort (ancient Mughal empire palace), Jama Masjid (one of the largest mosques in the world with a



capacity for 20,000 worshippers), Chandi chowk (a taste of India in one of the largest wholesale market places), Jantar Mantar (ancient astronomical observatory), Raj Ghat (the cremation spot of the great mahatma Gandhi), Feroz Shah Kokla Fort (ancient Mughal fort), Rashtrapati Bhawan (colonial palace), India Gate (memorial in the style of the Arch d'Triumph for 70,000 Indian soldiers lost in World War I), Humayun's Tomb (tomb in the Mughal style for the emperor Humayan), Qutb Minar (Muslim monument) and the Lotus Temple (spectacular modern temple to celebrate all religions). The monuments you will visit will be subject to the traffic and how long it takes to get around each one. We usually aim to visit 3-4 of the above mentioned sights in one day.

Day 17 Home

Departure

Accommodation:

NA

Food:

Breakfast at the hotel is the only meal included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & International flight.

This morning you will have a private transfer arranged for you to get you to the airport in order to catch your return flight home or onwards to your next destination.

Your tour and all Royle Safaris services end upon transfer to the airport

Please note that the itinerary stated above is correct as our planned intentions for the tour. However adverse weather conditions and other local considerations can necessitate some modifications of the itinerary during the course of the tour; any chances will be made to make the best of the time, weather conditions and other constraints forced upon us and all changes will be made in conjunction with our terms and conditions.

Tour Inclusions

Absolutely everything mentioned in the above itinerary is included (except where it is expressly mentioned as an optional extra).

- All accommodation as mentioned above or of a similar standard as mentioned.
- All meals as mentioned in the itinerary; **please note that some lunches and dinners are not included when staying in Delhi in this itinerary.**
- Bottled mineral or purified (boiled) water will be provided throughout and on request.
- Private vehicles for all transfers.
- English speaking local drivers and guides with years of experience in working in the areas we are travelling.
- When camping you will have a snow leopard spotter, camp cook and assistant and also a pony man and his mules for transporting the camp gear into the park.
- All fuel, tolls, taxes and other expenses relating to driving.
- All internal flights included in the itinerary: Delhi – Leh - Delhi; in economy class.
- All wildlife watching and cultural activities as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Entrance fees and permits to Hemis National Park.
- All camping equipment (excluding a sleeping and sleeping mat)
- Your snow leopard spotting guide will have a spotting scope or binoculars which you will be welcome to share (however we do recommend bringing your own – spotting scopes can be hired as they are expensive to buy, if you do not regularly use them).

Tour Exclusions

Nearly everything you will need is included in the price you have already paid for the tour. However there are some things not included.

- International flights to and from the tour start and end points.
- Travel insurance including any fees that result from emergency medical or evacuation needs.
- Visa fees for entering the country(s).
- Vaccinations and any medication are not included.
- Any food other than the meals provided and mentioned in the above itinerary; **please not that some lunches and dinners when staying in Delhi are not included in this itinerary**
- Any drinks not including in the meal.
- Any items of a personal nature are not included, such as souvenirs, medication, toiletries, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips are also not included.
- There are strict internal flight baggage allowances on all Indian internal flights. This is 15kg for checked baggage with charges for extra weight, it is around INR250-500 per kilogram extra.
- If any internal flights are cancelled on this trip (should any be included in the itinerary); due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances then any extra costs incurred such as hotels, food and transfers are extra.
- Any departure taxes which may be due when leaving are not included (but may be included in the cost of your flights).

Please refer to our Terms & Conditions (<http://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/terms-conditions/>) before booking any trips – email or paper copies of Terms & Conditions can be provided if needed