



APEX
EXPEDITIONS



Snow Leopard Quest

January 30 – February 12, 2015





© Giovanna Faisirelli. Cover: © Jonathan Rossouw

Expedition Overview

Epic. Few journeys in life can truly be described as “EPIC.” A quest to see a Snow Leopard in its natural realm is one such expedition. Exceedingly scarce, exquisitely beautiful, the “Grey Ghost of the Himalayas” is also the most elusive of the big cats. To see one requires exploring some of the most remote, rugged and scenically magnificent terrain on Earth in the depths of the Himalayan winter. It is at this time that this apex predator follows its hardy prey of wild sheep and ibex off the inhospitable, inaccessible peaks and into the range of our spotting scopes, binoculars and camera lenses. This is a journey to experience what a mere handful of nature enthusiasts have ever experienced, a pilgrimage to wildlife-watching’s “Holy Grail.” Epic, indeed!



© Jonathan Rossouw

Photos: **Prayer Flags, Snow Leopard Tracks, Hemis National Park.**





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Itinerary

Friday, January 30: New Delhi

Arrive in New Delhi, India's capital and one of the world's most vibrant cultural centers. Transfer to the *Radisson Blu Hotel* for a welcome dinner, briefing and overnight.

Saturday, January 31: Leh

Transfer for an early flight from New Delhi, with sunrise over the Himalayas revealing a scene of indescribable winter splendor. Arrive in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, in the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir. Situated at an altitude of 11,500 feet at the edge of the Tibetan plateau, Leh commands panoramic views over the upper Indus Valley. We spend two days exploring this colorful Himalayan town, while acclimatizing to the altitude. Overnight at the *Grand Dragon Hotel*.

Sunday, February 1: Leh

Strategically located between the Ladakh and Zaskar mountain ranges, Leh was an important way station along the "Silk Road" for centuries and reflects its history in a fascinating blend of Tibetan Buddhist and Islamic elements. Visit the active Shey Monastery, with its 39-foot gilded copper statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, marvel at the Buddhist wall paintings and scrolls within Leh Palace's labyrinthine corridors, or stroll the bazaars in search of Buddhist artifacts, cashmere garments or turquoise bead jewelry.

Below town, thicker scrub along the frozen banks of the Indus River harbors the attractive White-winged Redstart and, with luck, close scrutiny may reveal the cryptic Ibisbill, one of the world's most distinctive shorebirds. A late afternoon visit to the lonely ruins of Leh Castle offers magnificent vistas over the valley towards the 20,000-foot-high, tortured crags of the Zaskar range. Overnight at the *Grand Dragon Hotel*.



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© Giovanna Fasanelli

Photos: Leh Castle, Turquoise Beads, Temple Doors in Leh.



Monday, February 2: Zinchan / Hemis National Park

Wake early, excited at the day's prospects, the great mountain ramparts beckoning. Crossing the Indus River downstream from Leh, our convoy of Jeeps will snake through a barren but starkly beautiful landscape, ever upwards into Hemis National Park. Prayer flags flutter at the roadside and we'll stop to appreciate the scenic grandeur. At the summer sheep corrals of Zinchan, the vehicles can go no further and we bid our drivers farewell and continue on foot. Following our mule train and luggage up the frozen stream of the Husing River, we'll be engulfed by the magnitude of the Himalayas, finally rounding a spur to find the cluster of tents that will be our home for the next five nights. A trusty team of cooks, trackers and camp hands will meet us and help us settle in; Himalayan veterans, their vast collective experience and expertise are integral to the success of our mission. As the shadows fall across the valley, hot beverage in hand, we'll commence our first of many vigils, scanning the towering slopes for any sign of the "grey ghost!" Overnight *Husing Base Camp*.

Tuesday, February 3: Hemis National Park

Utterly dwarfed by the landscape, at an altitude of 13,500 feet, our Husing camp is strategically positioned at the junction of three subsidiary valleys, in an area where camera trap surveys have revealed a population of no fewer than nine resident and two transient Snow Leopards.

We commence our tracking pre-dawn, as these hours are peak activity periods for the cats. After breakfast, set off in search of fresh tracks or scat, watching the Bharal, or Blue Sheep, for nervous behavior, and listening for a panicked Himalayan Snowcock exploding from a distant ridge—all clues to the whereabouts of our feline focus. Bharal are the favorite winter prey of Snow Leopards. Highly adapted to an existence in the relative safety of jagged crags and scree-filled slopes, they blend a goat-like agility with the fleet-footed ability of wild sheep.

Finding a highly camouflaged cat in the immensity of these mountains requires keen eyes, knowledge of their movements and, above all, dogged determination, and we'll persist with our searching until the last light fades on the highest ridges. Evenings are spent in the relative warmth of the communal dining tent, sharing our impressions of the day, while outside, the legendary Himalayan stars seem close enough to touch. Overnight at *Husing Base Camp*.

Wednesday – Friday, February 4-6: Hemis National Park

Following a hearty breakfast each morning, await the latest information from our trackers, which will determine our chosen vantage point for the day's scanning. As we acclimatize to the altitude, we may choose to ascend part way up the surrounding slopes, increasing our views over the surrounding areas. Steep terrain makes for perfect viewing, often spanning 270 degrees, with the crisp, dry air allowing crystal-clarity of animals seen at distances approaching a mile.

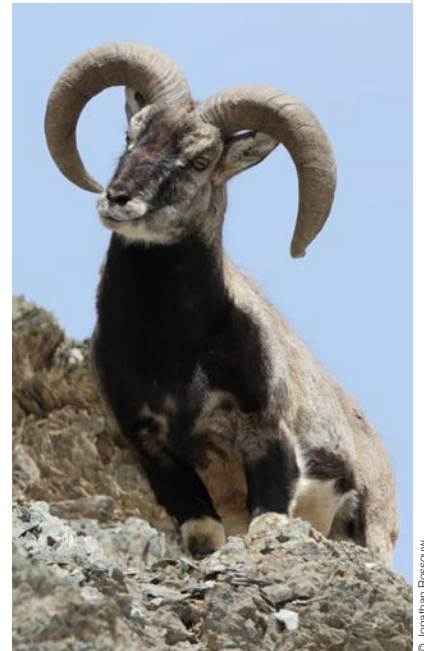
Distractions from our primary task are few but a trotting Red Fox may catch our eye, while whistles from Royle's Pikas echo from jumbled rock piles. Few birds survive in these extremes, although small coveys of Chukar Partridge are occasionally glimpsed scuttling up a slope, while overhead, lone Golden Eagles and garrulous flocks of Red-billed Choughs are often seen soaring along the cliffs. At this time of year, Snow Leopards prepare for mating, patrolling and marking their territories.



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Photos: **Scoping for Snow Leopards, Royle's Pika, Bharal or Blue Sheep.**



If our Snow Leopard quest has been successful, we may take a day hike further up the valley to the ancient settlement of Rumbak, where a welcoming community offers insights into the traditional way of life of rural Ladakhis. Overnight at *Husing Base Camp*.

Saturday, February 7: Leh

After a final farewell to our loyal camp team, we hike out of the park to meet our vehicles at Zinchan, retracing our journey to Leh, where voluminous hot water and heated bedrooms make for a welcome change from the rigors of camp life! Overnight at the *Grand Dragon Hotel*.

Sunday, February 8: Uley

Today's road journey leads us down the Indus Valley and past dramatic vistas of the Zaskar Mountains en route to the remote village of Uley. Ladakhi hospitality originated centuries ago when nomadic traders would dine and overnight with local villagers. Living in a land of few hotels, the people of Ladakh still consider hosting strangers an integral part of their culture, and your Uley homestay is an extension of this proud tradition. Offering an intimate, first-hand experience of life in Uley, from animal husbandry to local customs to cooking techniques, this will be a cultural highlight of our visit to Ladakh. Overnight in an Uley homestay with a local family.

Monday, February 9: Uley

Snow Leopard conservation initiatives, including education on minimizing livestock losses, compensation schemes and homestay ecotourism, have been highly successful in the Uley Valley, with the population slowly recovering from centuries of persecution and the big cats now regularly encountered throughout the area. We'll also make a special effort to locate Siberian Ibex, which occurs here in groups up to twenty strong. Sable-colored animals with blond saddles and sporting massive, bow-shaped horns exceeding 5 feet in length, these are the largest and most impressive of all the world's wild goats. Overnight in an Uley homestay with a local family.

Tuesday, February 10: Leh

After a final morning exploring the Uley Valley, we return to Leh, with photographic stops en route. Dinner and overnight at the *Grand Dragon Hotel*.

Wednesday, February 11: New Delhi

After breakfast transfer to the airport for our flight back to New Delhi. On arrival at our hotel, enjoy a leisurely lunch before setting out on an afternoon tour of New Delhi. The city is known for its formal parks, wide boulevards, magnificent Parliament Building, the Rashtrapati Bhawan and the India Gate. Visit Qutab Minar, the 237-foot-high tower dating back to the 13th century and Humayun's Tomb (built in the 16th century and architecturally the fore runner of the Taj Mahal). Farewell dinner and overnight at the *Claridges Hotel*.

Thursday, February 12: New Delhi

Transfer to the airport for your early morning flight homeward.



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© Malcolm Fair

Photos: Ibisbill; Homestay family and child, Uley; Humayun's Tomb, Delhi.



Your Expedition Leaders

Jonathan Rossouw

Jonathan Rossouw is one of the world's most experienced expedition leaders, having guided wildlife trips in over 150 countries on all seven continents. He combines a legendary energy and enthusiasm with a broad knowledge of all aspects of natural history, gained from three decades spent in the pursuit of the world's mammals, birds, reptiles and coral reef fishes. Indeed, having seen over 8,000 species of birds, 800 mammals and 2,000 coral reef fishes, he will likely experience more species of vertebrate animals than anyone in history!

A medical doctor by training, Jonathan was born and raised on South Africa's east coast and spent his family vacations in the games reserves of Zululand. It was here that the foundation was laid for a lifelong passion for wildlife and wild places and, in 1996, a "short break" to cycle across South America from Buenos Aires to Cusco led to two years spent guiding at eco-lodges in the Amazon and doing bird surveys in the Andes. He returned to Africa to start a birding travel company, before joining Peter Harrison and Shirley Metz, to assist in expanding their global portfolio of natural history destinations. An accomplished photographer, Jonathan's images have appeared in many books and magazines, and he has co-authored birding site guides to Uganda, Southern Africa and Madagascar.



Giovanna Fasanelli

A life-long love affair with the sea propelled Giovanna into the world of marine biology, conservation, underwater photography and natural history documentaries. From an early childhood exploring the rock pools of South Africa's shorelines she immigrated to Australia and wasted no time in getting her PADI Dive Master certification. She has since logged over 1,000 dives throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Whilst completing her marine biology degree at Australia's James Cook University, Giovanna worked at an underwater film company, gaining experience tagging Tiger Sharks and Green Turtles in the Coral Sea and assisting with film production. This opportunity spawned a decade-long career in television, presenting the latest developments in aquaculture and fisheries science. In 2013 Giovanna worked with National Geographic Channel in co-presenting a documentary series, *Australia: Life on the Edge*, as the marine biologist and submarine pilot showcasing stories from around the continent's shores.

Giovanna's passion for wilderness and animals has driven her to explore habitats around the world from Snow Leopards in the Himalayas to Komodo Dragons in Indonesia and Mountain Gorillas in Uganda. Fast approaching 100 countries visited, Giovanna has extensive experience as a guide and naturalist all over the world. A talented photographer and skilled writer, Giovanna's work is regularly featured in several Australian magazines. Her deep love and concern for the environment has led her to be an advocate for conservation.



"When it comes to expedition travel, in particular, one needs to be led by a knowledgeable, enthusiastic, entertaining and confidence-inspiring professional. We have yet to meet anyone quite like Jonathan who so completely ticks all these boxes!"

– Pat G., Durban



Expedition Details

Snow Leopard Quest January 30 – February 12, 2015

\$8,770 Per Person Rate

\$9,470 Solo Rate

14 Days Trip Length

12 Guests Group Size

New Delhi / New Delhi Start/End

Included

Apex Expeditions' rates include all accommodations; all meals, activities and excursions as described in the itinerary; airfare within India, as noted in the itinerary; local beer and local wines at lunch & dinner; services of two Apex Expedition leaders and local guides throughout the itinerary, as well as expert trackers, porters and mules in Hemis National Park; all gratuities; airport transfers; permits and entrance fees; and all taxes.

Not Included

Costs not included in the price of your Apex expedition include travel to and from start and end point of trip; premium brand drinks and liquor; travel insurance (Trip Cancellation and Interruption, as well as Emergency Medical and Evacuation insurance); sleeping bag; airport departure taxes; passport and/or visa fees; excess luggage fees; items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, souvenirs, etc.); and independent travel arrangements pre- or post-trip.

Payments & Terms

20% of the trip cost will confirm your place on the expedition. The final balance is due 150 days prior to departure. All prices are quoted in U.S. dollars and must be paid in U.S. dollars. Per person pricing is based on double occupancy. The Solo Rate is paid by participants who specifically request single accommodations and is subject to availability. If you are traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate of the same gender. However, if a roommate is not available, the published Solo Rate will be charged. Upon confirming your reservation you will be required to pay the published Solo Rate, if we are able to pair you with a roommate, the applicable difference will be refunded at the time that the final trip payment is due for all participants. Please note that solo accommodations are limited and cannot always be guaranteed throughout. For our full set of Terms & Conditions, please visit our web site at www.apex-expeditions.com.

One-of-a-kind adventures to the world's most fascinating places. Join us.



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Reservation Form

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Person 1: (Primary Contact)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Details:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____ Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Double Solo

Person 2: (If applicable and at same address, otherwise please submit a second Reservation Form.)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Deposit Information:

- My deposit check is enclosed (20% of total tour fare)
 Charge my deposit to my: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card #: _____ Expires: _____ CCV Code: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

**Please return this completed form to Apex Expeditions.
E-mail: info@apex-expeditions.com or Mail: 3275 36th Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98126**

