



## **The Snow Leopard Lodge**

Ladakh at the northern boundary of India, is a once in a lifetime, must visit destination. The stark natural beauty is awe-inspiring as is the elusive and enigmatic snow leopard that is found amid the mountains of Ladakh. The climate of the area is sub-arctic to arctic with less rainfall during summers and heavy snowfall during winters and temperature dropping much below freezing point. There are many rare and endangered animal species found in this cold desert, amongst these are the elusive Snow Leopard, Ibex, Tibetan Antelope, Blue Sheep, Shapo, Marmot, Tibetan Hare etc. Among the avi fauna population found are the Snow Partridge, Golden Oriole, Snow Cock, Golden Eagle, Horned Lark, Red Billed Chuff etc.



Drive west today on the road to Kargil and Srinagar, generally following the Indus River. You pass through the small town of Nimmu – one of the most important in Ladakh, where the Zaskar River meets the Indus. After a little over an hour you head north on a road marked to Likir – one of Ladakh’s famous Buddhist monasteries. This is all snow leopard country. The landscape here is even bigger, more expansive and open, until you turn off onto a dirt road, winding up a narrow valley, following a stream called the Ulley Chhu. Smaller valleys intersect and the guides have their heads craned all the time, scanning the hill sides and the skyline for any silhouette. This is excellent Ibex country and there are few more evocative sights than a magnificently horned male Ibex standing vigil on some impossibly narrow outcropping, a few thousand feet over a plunging cliff. Ulley village, west of Leh is an area that is only recently being developed for Snow Leopard watching.

You will be staying at The Snow leopard lodge – which apart from being more comfortable than camping out in sub-zero temperatures – puts money directly into local hands and strengthens the constituency of the snow leopard. This will be your base for your stay searching for snow leopards and other high altitude wildlife. The lodge consists of 4 bedrooms, built separately from the main house with a dining room and kitchen – all in the same low stone built building. For our clients, we bring in our own cook and camp staff with an assortment of important luxuries like extra gas heaters, warm shower (and bathroom!), long drop toilet but with a comfortable thunder box, comfortable mattresses, linen, an assortment of coffees, teas, snacks etc that go a long way to alleviate the cold and the altitude. Add to this the interest of living with a Ladakhi family in the depths of winter and understanding their life-style and you have a very special experience in store - especially sharing the large



and warm kitchens that are the heart of a Ladkahi home in winter and resplendent with



brass, copper and silver ornaments.

From the house and its terraced fields you command a superb view across the valley and are almost certain to see Ibex from here and if you are lucky much other wildlife including wolf, Himalayan fox and perhaps even snow leopard. Settle in on arrival and acclimatize to the higher altitude of Ulley. You will be based here and the advantage of Ulley is that it is relatively free of tourism and the chaos that has enveloped the first snow leopard destination - Rumbak. The other advantage is that from here you explore 3 valleys, which, apart from snow leopards, are great for finding urial, Ibex, wolf and Himalayan fox. Norbu is an exceptional tracker and spotter whose entire being seems to be narrowed down to the field of vision of his binoculars. Booking in at the Lodge is the simplest way of looking for snow leopards allowing you complete flexibility as to the number of days you want to spend and requiring none of the elaborate preparations that you need to camp out. Add to this the exceptional tracking skills of Norbu and his team and the exclusivity of the location which makes for a truly superb high-altitude wilderness experience.

Over the next few days you explore the area on foot and SUV's with Norbu tracking the snow leopard. You will be amazed at the sheer dedication and commitment he brings to his trade and the effort he makes to ensure that his guests leave happy. Norbu interacts closely with the local people and uses the network of local intelligence to narrow down the likely sites. In the process there will also be plenty of opportunity for you to get insights into local folklore, as well as learn about local customs and traditions.

Overnight stay at The Snow leopard lodge