



**OUTWARD BOUND  
INDIA - HIMALAYA™**



THE ZANSKAR RIVER  
Ladakh, India  
Class III/IV  
*August OR September 2015*

It doesn't get much better than this! The Zaskar offers all the elements for a perfect exploratory trip—exciting but safe whitewater, spectacular canyon scenery, extensive cultural contact, lots of diversity, great monasteries and palaces, beautiful campsites, dry and pleasant weather, remoteness, and an excellent local crew. It's an immersion in Tibetan Buddhism with a touch of Moghul majesty, a photographer's paradise.

When George Wendt, founder and owner of OARS, the biggest rafting company in the world, did this trip with us in 2012, he declared it the best international river trip he had ever done.

John Yost, Sobek Expeditions co-founder and long-time international river guide, rates the Zaskar as the #1 river experience in the world, combining true adventure and wilderness with superb off-river activities. It is remote and wild enough to keep the

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crowds away, a truly special place. The Zaskar takes you into a world of awe and wonder, of whitewater action and scenic overkill.

### **ITINERARY**

#### **DAY 1 ~ Delhi**

Transfers will be provided on this day. You'll be met at the airport on arrival and brought to the hotel. If you are arriving earlier, and are booking extra hotel nights or a tour (for example to the Taj Mahal, Rajasthan, Varanasi or just around Delhi) through us, we will also include the airport transfer.

If you are arriving early and choose to make your own travel arrangements, you can take advantage of Delhi's extremely reliable and convenient system of the air conditioned radio taxis. Look for the booths labeled Radio Taxis (OLA, EASY, MERU) when you exit from customs, give them the address of your destination, board your taxi and pay by meter. No hassles or bargaining needed.

No activities are planned for the day except an orientation meeting at 6 pm in the lobby of the hotel and a welcome dinner after the meeting. If you arrive on your own, we suggest you check out some of the monuments that we do not plan to visit on our city tour, like Humayun's Tomb, the National Museum, or Qutab Minar, the world's tallest brick tower set amongst Hindu temples. Visits to the monuments can be arranged through us if you like.

*Dinner only-Metropolitan Hotel or similar*

*Note*—The date and time of arrival in Delhi varies greatly from carrier to carrier. Most flights arrive in Delhi either very late in the evening (between 10:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m.) or early in the morning (between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m.). We are holding reservations at the hotel in Delhi for the group starting the afternoon of Day 1. If you arrive early in the morning of Day 1, you will need hotel accommodation for the previous night in order to check in immediately. This night would be at your own expense, but we can make reservations for you at the same hotel.

#### **Day 2 ~ Srinagar**

After breakfast we drive to the airport for a morning flight to Srinagar, the historical capital city of Kashmir. Nestling in the midst of the great peaks of the Karakoram, Zaskar and Pir Panjal ranges at a height of 5,676 feet, Srinagar is a truly beautiful city.



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The summer capital (May - October) of Jammu & Kashmir and the center of the valley, this city has been eulogized by travelers, poets, kings and saints alike for its scenic splendor and delightful ambience.

Srinagar is renowned for its enchanting lakes filled with houseboats and *shikaras* (gondola like boats) set amidst forested mountain slopes. The most prominent natural feature of Srinagar is the Dal Lake, a large lake surrounded by luxuriant chinar and poplar trees. The waters of the Dal Lake are dotted with small willow covered islands that give an ethereal ambience to the lake on misty mornings. A unique feature of the lake is the Mihrbahri people, trading in flowers, fruits and vegetables grown on floating gardens on islands in the lake.

We stay on deluxe houseboats on the lake, usually made out of cedar that resists water-logging for a very long time, and elaborately furnished and decorated. The famous Dal Lake houseboats are floating homes with all the modern facilities. Our meals are prepared on board, and handicraft and rug vendors will come to pitch their wares to anyone interested

After lunch and a rest on the tranquil houseboats, we'll ride *shikaras* back to town to visit a nearby Hindu temple. At a height of 1,100 feet on Shankaracharya Hill is the Shankaracharya Temple. This ancient hilltop shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva is said to have been built by King Gopaditya in 371 BC. Over time, the temple was renovated and reconstructed by several rulers, including Lalitaditya, Zain-ul-Abidin, Sheikh Mohi-ud-Din and finally Maharaja Gulab Singh.

*All meals--Royal Houseboats or similar*

### **DAY 3 ~ Kargil (8,780')**

We get up just before dawn to ride our *shikaras* to the morning vegetable market, a pageant of sound and color. In the quiet of dawn, the noisy life of the market seems even more vibrant. We paddle back to the houseboats, enjoy breakfast aboard, then head back to dry land.

On our way out of town to the mountains, we'll visit one or two of the Mughal Gardens with their terraced lawns, cascading fountains, and palette-bright flowerbeds. The Nishat Bagh (Garden of Bliss) was designed in 1633 by Asaf Khan, the brother of Empress Nur Jahan, and features terraced layers with water channels flowing down the centre. The larger and most elaborate garden of the Mughals is the Shalimar Bagh (Abode of Love), laid out by Emperor Jahangir for his wife Nur Jahan. On the topmost terrace is the pavilion reserved for the royal visitors. Supported by stunning black



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marble pillars, the pavilion had tiny niches that were used to keep fragrant flowers in the day and light up the pavilion with lamps at night.

We drive about 6 hours through magnificent mountain scenery from the Kashmir valley into the Zaskar region. The first half of the drive is a scenic ascent to Sonamarg and steeply up to Zojila Pass (11,572'), the Gateway to Ladakh. We continue our drive towards Drass, which claims to be the second coldest inhabited place in the world, with Buddhist manuscripts in the form of rock carvings along the roadside. Another two and half hours drive from Drass will take us to Kargil, a dusty commercial town where we halt for tonight. This area also has been part of the highest battle field in the world, and you will see the military presence all along from Draas to Leh.

*All meals—D'zojila Hotel or similar*

### **DAY 4 ~ Rangdum (12,900')**

Today we'll take a spectacular 6 hour drive past the villages of Panikar and Parkachik, with magnificent views of the Nun and Kun massifs (23,409' and 23,218' respectively), hanging glaciers, and large meadows. By the roadside fat and sassy marmots scamper, curious to watch but timid, and *dzos* (a yak-cow cross) plod decorously. Our destination is a fixed tented camp with beds and electricity at the foot of the scenic Rangdum Gompa (a gompa is a Buddhist monastery and religious center).

*All meals—Tented Camp*

### **DAY 5 ~ Remala (11,930') & begin float**

After an early breakfast, we walk up to the nearby Rangdum Gompa, founded in the early 16th century and currently home to about 40 monks. Rangdum has a small "museum" with fine artifacts. It is perched picturesquely atop a centrally rising hillock within the arms of a bifurcated mountain stream. We then continue on the 4 hour drive to Remala, the starting point for the rafting trip on the Doda River, a tributary of the Zaskar. Our drive takes us over the Pensi La (14,500'), which affords us grand views of the Zaskar peaks and the Darang Durong glacier that feeds the Zaskar River 25 miles below, into which we venture this afternoon. Without loading all of our gear we will paddle light boats for 2-3 hours down to Karsha (11,470'), where we meet the rest of our expedition crew and gear, and set up camp. We ease into the rhythm of the river with gentle Class II rapids, a good introduction for first-timers. And what scenery: We're surrounded by 19,000-foot-high peaks of startling beauty, while closer by the villages, *chortens* (Buddhist monuments), colorful meadows, and local peoples enthrall!



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*All meals--Camp*

### **DAY 6 ~ Zangla (11,270') or similar**

In the morning we drive to the foot of Karsha Gompa, a 15th-century monastery clinging to steep cliffs, presided over by a brother of the Dalai Lama, and hike steeply up to the monastery. Three chapels contain numerous statues and other art objects, among which is a set of exquisite silver and copper *chortens*. Of particular interest is the temple at the top of the gompa, where frescoes believed to be more than 300 years old adorn the damaged walls. Once we are done there, we'll use our transport to drive back across the Zaskar to the town of Padum, an interesting market town with some good shopping for Tibetan jewelry, trinkets, and carpets. There's even internet access for anyone who needs a fix.

After we leave our camp the river begins to pick up speed, and we'll enjoy more Class II rapids. The landscapes continue to be otherworldly, and the cultural interaction with villagers who rarely see outsiders is fascinating. We'll try to select a campsite tonight that is not only comfortable and lovely, but that has access to a remote village or a monastery too or perhaps an intriguing cleft in the sandstone to explore.

*All meals—Camp*

### **DAYS 7-9 ~ The gorge**

From our camp it's not far to the gorge, the highlight of the river trip. The Zaskar Gorge is steep and deep, complete with towering walls, breathtaking geology, waterfalls, and challenging whitewater. Camps are scarce, and it is uncertain where we will spend these nights—since we will be looking for new camps and hikes, we just don't know what we'll find. We plan to limit our river hours so that we can explore some of the many tributaries that beckon the adventurous hiker in this mini-Grand Canyon that never ceases to amaze. We are sure to see some wonderful sights, including some that will be a surprise even to the crew!

We may stop and hike up to a village named Nyerag, where the friendly locals show us their traditional homes and clothing, and offer for sale Tibetan-style rugs that they weave.



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We run more than 25 miles of thrilling Class III rapids, with the newly added thrill of a rapid created by debris from road construction in the area which we call Jackhammer. It's a quick Class V slam that definitely gets your attention (and in certain water levels must be portaged). There may be a couple Class IVs depending on water level, and the last full day on the river has the best action of all. NOTE—In high water the river becomes a solid Class IV rafting experience.

*All meals—Camp*

### **DAY 10 ~ Leh**

This is our last day on the river. The rafting pace slows down, but the scenery never stops. We usually have lunch at the take-out just after the confluence with the Indus, so our boats will at least taste a few minutes of the waters of the mighty Indus. On the way back to our hotel in Leh we could visit some monasteries from the many along the Indus. Some possibilities are Basgo, Likir, and Spituk.

Basgo monastery, built on a spectacular ridge above the village, features a giant statue of the Maitreya Buddha and 16<sup>th</sup> century murals. It is built around the ruins of a castle from the middle ages. Likir, founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, combines the old with the new. It features several temples honoring Tara, Avalokiteshvara, Sakyamuni, Amitabha, and the founder of the Gelugpa or yellow-hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism, plus a newly completed 75 foot tall statue of a seated Buddha, resplendently painted and beautifully finished. Spituk is a large 11<sup>th</sup>-century monastery, with over 100 monks in residence and several subsidiary gompas around the valley. It features two lovely temples and several more halls filled with *thangkas* (elaborate scroll paintings), murals and statues of several different Buddhas and *rinpoches* (teachers).

Hot showers and cold beers await us at the hotel, as does a great meal to top off the day.

*All meals--Spic'n Span Hotel or similar*

### **DAY 11 ~ Leh**

We drive upriver along the Indus to Hemis Gumpa. The Hemis Monastery on the west banks of the Indus River belongs to the Drugpa order and is perhaps the largest and the richest monastery in central Ladakh. The monastery treasures a copper-gilt statue of Lord Buddha along with other gold and silver statues. It has a very impressive museum of Buddhist art too.



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Then we head back towards Leh, stopping first at Thiksey. Thiksey monastery is known as one of the most beautiful monasteries of Ladakh region. The monastery is famous for the images of Shakyamuni Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Dharamkaya, Mahakali and Bhairava. We'll have our lunch at a small restaurant inside the monastery. [Shey Gompa](#), our final monastery stop, was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has a huge two-storey high image of Buddha made of copper and gilded with gold - the largest metal statue and the second largest Buddha statue in Ladakh. The lower storey has a library with fine murals.

(Please note, the monastery visits are open to group discussion and changes can be made.)

What remains of the afternoon is free to shop and pack, then anyone who still has energy can take a sunset excursion out to the Shanti (peace) stupa on the outskirts of Leh. A magnificent white-domed structure, the Shanti Stupa of Leh Ladakh offers spectacular views of the sunset. The stupa looks best at night, when it is beautifully illuminated with glittering lights.

*All meals--Spic 'n Span Hotel or similar*

### **DAY 12 ~ Delhi**

Early morning transfer to the airport for your flight to Delhi, where we'll be met and driven to our hotel. The rest of the morning is free to relax and prepare for the journey home. Our interesting afternoon walking tour of off-the-beaten-track Delhi includes a visit to the Jama (Great) Mosque, built in 1650, and a look at the breathtaking Red Fort (1639-48), built by Shah Jehan, creator of the Taj Mahal. It is, however, a different kind of city tour. We may include metro, bus, *tuk-tuk* (auto rickshaw), and bicycle rickshaw rides, or go on foot into the turbulent old city to immerse ourselves in the hustle and bustle of daily life in Delhi, enjoying the color of the spice market and the street life.

We combine a farewell lunch with this unique tour, as many people choose to board flights home on this night, making the timing for a group farewell dinner problematic. You're free to depart this night (as many of the flights leave in the middle of the night) or spend a night at the hotel before you fly out. Rooms will be provided for everyone regardless of your time of departure. Transfers to the airport are included. Dinner is on your own.

*Breakfast & lunch--Metropolitan Hotel or similar*

### **DAY 13 ~ Depart**



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If you didn't fly out during the night, we'll provide a transfer to the airport for your departure on homeward-bound flights.

### *Breakfast*

### **ACCLIMATIZATION**

Most of this trip is spent above 10,000 feet, and we sleep one night at 13,000 feet. The itinerary is planned for gradual acclimatization in order to allow your blood to adjust to the need to carry more oxygen as the air thins out. We fly into Srinagar, at an elevation of 6,000 feet, drive the next day over a high pass then down to sleep at 9,000 feet, then up to a night at 13,000 feet, then back down to 12,000 feet to begin the float. Most people are thoroughly acclimatized, having suffered only headaches of varying degrees, by the time we sleep at the highest spot. On all trips so far, anyone who feels dizzy and nauseous that night has recovered by the time we are on the river. We carry a canister of oxygen for the drive (when we are at the highest elevation). If you have had previous difficulty with altitude sickness, please discuss with your doctor the possibility of taking Diamox or a similar drug to facilitate adaptation to the altitude gains.

### **INSURANCE**

We **VERY STRONGLY** recommend that you check what your current insurance will cover on a trip, and then purchase additional insurance for anything else you feel you need. We particularly advise buying trip cancellation, medical and evacuation insurance in case of last minute changes in plans or a need for emergency medical treatment or evacuation while on the trip. An excellent option is [www.worldnomads.com/travel-insurance/](http://www.worldnomads.com/travel-insurance/). At a modest cost they will supply evacuation insurance from anywhere in the world to any hospital, promptly and without questions.

For Indian participants we can insure you with the only company that provides 'adventure' insurance

You will be required to sign a liability waiver acknowledging the insurance situation to participate in the trip.



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We wish to advise you that the fares given above may not be available at the time of booking the ticket and seats cannot be booked without issuance of ticket. These are current fares and they fluctuate vastly.

COST: contact :info@outwardboundindia.com

### **The price will includes the following**

- 01 night Accommodation on twin sharing basis at Deluxe houseboat in Srinagar on all basis
- 01 night Accommodation on twin sharing basis at Rangdum (fixed Camp all basis
- 05 nights' Accommodation on twin sharing basis at Camps from Karsha to Lamaguru on All inclusive basis
- 02 nights' Accommodation on twin sharing basis at hotel Namgyal Palace in Leh on Breakfast & Dinner basis
- 02 nights Accommodation on twin sharing basis at Vivanta by Taj in Delhi on bed & breakfast
- Services of English Speaking guide in Delhi, Leh & Srinagar
- Transfers & Sightseeing in Leh by Non-AC Innova(4 pax sharing 01 Innova)
- Transfers & Sightseeing in Delhi by AC Mini Coach
- Camping Support like mattress, tents, toilet tents, kitchen tent, cook and helper etc
- Guides & Safety Kayakers
- Rafting equipment like gear raft, paddles, helmets & life jackets, wet suits & splash jackets

### **The cost will not include:**

- International and internal airfares
- Visa and Insurance
- Tipping at restaurants, drivers, guides
- Expenses arising from unexpected fuel hikes, and other situations beyond our control
- Costs towards evacuation of customers for medical or any other reason
- Any expenses of personal nature like tips. Laundry/phone calls etc.
- Any increase in taxes etc.