

Location of Expedition: Himalayan Sham Valley, Ladakh, India

Purpose of Trip: Amateur Photography Expedition

Expectations of Trip

In June 2018 I travelled to the region of Ladakh in India's most northern state of Kashmir. This beautiful Himalayan region, which is only open to tourists for a few months every year due for safety reasons due to the snow, was the perfect destination to carry out my first photography expedition. I had originally intended to focus this photography project on Ladakhi residents of the Himalayan mountains. However, I later decided to photograph the region's beautiful scenery.

The Trip

As Ladakh is 3000m above sea level, I spent 3 days acclimatising to these conditions in its largest city, Leh. Attracting thousands of Indian and global tourists every year, the city of Leh is currently transitioning from a small tourist town to a larger city that can cater to all of this rising incoming traffic. Construction is rampant across the city, and the city's new residents consist of a number of migrant construction workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

On day 3, I set off on a Himalayan Trek – 5 days through the Sham Valley Region. My guide, Stanzin, was a 21 year old Ladakhi university student, who was earning some extra money working as a guide during the summer. We set off early in the morning from a local Buddhist monastery near the city, to ensure that we had reached our first village before the hot, afternoon sun. The trek involved steep uphill slants, as well as flatter terrain through the mountainous Himalayan region. The scenery was immense, and featured both snowy and rocky mountains, as well as luscious green villages along the way. Every day of the trek involved an early start and roughly 10km of walking, after which we arrived at a new village. We stayed overnight in a number of different homestays, where owners would welcome us into their homes, serve us salty Ladakhi tea and cook dinner for us using organic produce grown on their small patches of land. In the evenings we visited monasteries in the villages and took time to interact with village residents. We swam in waterfalls, watched the local Dzos (a mix of Yak and local cattle) graze the Himalayan farmlands and watched as villagers discussed local issues such as environmental change and lack of water in village meetings.

On returning to the city of Leh, I spend the final day travelling, via car, to Ladakh's magnificent, illuminous blue Pangong Lake, which sits on the Indo-Chinese border.

How the Grant Helped Me

Throughout the trip, I was able to capture a range of scenic pictures, which I have sent to some amateur photography competitions. As an amateur photographer, this trip offered me the opportunity to travel to an area that I wouldn't have been able to go to otherwise. I was able to spend a number of days with my camera, taking numerous scenic photos for the first of what I hope will be many trips for the future. I hope to use some of the skills I developed on this trip during my PhD fieldwork, which I will be carrying out in India beginning in summer 2019. It has helped me to build confidence taking quality photos in an unfamiliar region.

Some of the Photos



Pangong Lake



Sham Valley