

SNOW LEOPARD TREK

Duration: 08 Days

Level: Easy

Welcome to Lungnak! You have chosen a spectacular route! The route leading from Raru village to Phuktal monastery is of moderate difficulty. You will be trekking along the Tsarap River. This trail description leads along the eastern side of the river, but there is a trail along the western side as well. You may want to trek along one side on the way there, and the other side on the way back, as they offer different views of the canyon and quite a different.

Day 1:

Your journey will begin by taking a taxi from Padum to Raru village. On the way you can stop at Bardan monastery and Mune monastery. With no stops, the drive to Raru will take about 1.5 hours. Your first homestay night will be spent in Raru, a village of about 36 houses, around which you may be able to see Ibex and Himalayan Brown Bear.

Day 2:

Today you will trek from Raru to Ichar, a moderate trek of about 4 hours. To find the trail, go to the tea stall and walk downhill. You will pass two chortens, walk through some agricultural fields to the right of a small canal. The trail becomes clear at some point at the edge of the fields. For the first kilometer, you will walk through easy rolling terrain. Once you see the Tsarap River in front of you, the trail downhill to the bridge is steep and winding, and after crossing the bridge you will make a steep and winding ascent. Close to the top of this ascent, the trail splits. Continue on the trail which is uphill, ahead of you, slightly to the right, between two large rocks that are flanking the trail. (Do not take the downhill trail.) The trail continues steeply uphill for a few hundred meters, and then becomes more rolling. Less than one kilometer away, there is a rock overhang with a small freshwater spring., which makes it a great rest or lunch spot. You are about half-way to Ichar. From here you have a gradual ascent to a pass, marked with a mane wall (a low wall covered with stones on which a prayer is carved) and prayer flags. From the pass, you can see Ichar village in the distance, and Dorzong village at the visible end of the valley. The terrain down to Ichar is largely rolling. Finally you enter Ichar's agricultural fields and terraces, passing some chortens (a large mound and spire- like structure in which religious relicts are housed) and a mane wall. When the trail takes a steep downward path into a gorge, be sure to take the upper of the two trails, cross the stream and the willow patch along the stream. The trails resumes across the stream, just close to the point where the stream splits into two. Continue the steep uphill to Ichar village.

The village of Ichar has 20 households, and is also home to a beautiful chorten which is

believed to hold 11-century relicts from the great Buddhist translator, Rinchen Zangpo. A visit to the Ichar monastery will allow you to see statues of Avalokiteswara, and a White Tara (Dolma). This monastery is under the monastic tradition of Phuktal, and is home to Lamas from Phuktal. In the remnants of the Ichar Palace is a stunning gold plated statue of Maitreya Buddha (Future Buddha), also thought by residents to be from the 11th century.

Days 3:

You will walk from Ichar to Anmo village today, a trek which will take about 5-6 hours. From Ichar, there are two trails out of the village which will converge later, starting from the southern end of Ichar. You will pass some mane walls, and the Tsarap will be to the west of you, flowing north. The terrain is rolling and fairly easy. At the edge of Dorzang village, take the upper trail (there may be a gate or some poles to cross there) and go through this small village of 3 houses. The trail turns slightly left, and then you will go downhill to cross the stream, and back uphill to a small pass, winding to the left of a large rocky outcrop. The trail branches behind this outcrop, and you will need to take the lower trail. From here, there is a winding, sometimes steep and rocky descent for less than one kilometer, until you reach more rolling terrain. You will cross a rock slide area with huge boulders strewn next to the trail, and a small stream. This is about half-way to Anmo. As you continue on you will descend so that you are now only 10-15 meters above the Tsarap River. You can see the village of Tsetang across a rugged gorge and a large sloping uplift. You will descend to cross a stream whose valley is covered with willows, wild roses, and Myricaria, locally called Umbu, a shrub whose reddish branches are eaten by snow leopards presumably as a digestive aid. A few hundred meters later, the trail branches. Take the upper trail, and the sharp upward turn at the edge of the boundary wall. Follow the trail uphill along the lower stone wall into the village of Anmo—a small and picturesque hamlet of only 4 houses.

Days 4:

From Anmo you will go to Phuktal Monastery, passing through Cha on your way there, or alternatively break your journey at Cha and stop here for the night. Take the trail out of Anmo by walking along a small canal at the opposite end of the village that you entered from. You will pass Dolma Gompa and nunnery about 1-2 hours after Anmo. This small monastery is believed to have natural carvings of the goddess Tara. Look at the flat rock to the left-hand side of the prayer flags to see if you can discern these sacred carvings. You will reach the village of Cha about two kilometers past Dolma Gompa, 2-3 hours after starting from Anmo. The entrance is marked by 5 stupas in black, yellow, and white. To continue on to Phuktal, you will walk through Cha to the eastern edge, along a water canal (with a stone wall on your right). The trail will cross the water canal. Take the trail which is closer to the wall, not the well-worn path. You will pass a small pond on your right, a good spot for waterbirds. Walk uphill to a mane wall. Further uphill you will be able to see the village and campground of Purne, which is at the confluence of the Kargyak and Tsarap Rivers. You will walk along the Tsarap River for about 5 kilometers before you reach a waterfall and a stream crossing. You will then see a water pipe along the trail, which leads to Phuktal Monastery. It should take you 2-3 hours to reach Phuktal from Cha.

Days 5:

From Phuktal Monastery, you will begin to make your way to Padum, spending one night in the village of Cha, which you passed through on your way from Anmo. One of Cha's most fascinating attraction is a large rock emergence that is covered with hundreds of petroglyphs, some dated to be 2000 years old. If you go downhill to cross Cha's bridge across the Tsarap River, once you ascend from the bridge, you will emerge onto this wealth of ancient drawings, depicting hunters on horseback with bow and arrow, ibex, blue sheep, snow leopards, and a species of cat that seems to be unknown to science...perhaps reflecting the presence of a now extinct animal, or perhaps reflecting the imagination of the artist. Be careful where you step...the rock is literally covered with these ancient drawings.

Days 6:

You can visit the petroglyphs on your way out of Cha the next day as well, if you decide to make the return journey via the trail along the west side of the river. There are no homestays along this route, but there are bridges to cross back to each of homestay villages. This trail is used for people traveling with pack animals, and is slightly wider and smoother than the one on the east side. It goes downhill to the water's edge a number of times and the return uphill is sometimes a steep climb; however, it is worth the entirely different experience trekking along this side.

From Cha petroglyphs, it is 5-6 hours to Ichar. If you want to continue all the way to Raru from Cha, it will be 9-10 hours of trekking.

Trek rate: On Request



TSARAP HIMALAYAN ADVENTURES