

LADAKH and ZANSKAR, INDIA



A visual photographic journey through the remote

High Indian Himalaya

with former National Geographic photographer

William Thompson, PhD

and

Superlative Professional Photographer

Sarah Waters



August 15- September 1

(exact dates of this 14 day journey yet to be determined)



The Journey

Ladakh and Zaskar provide some of the most fascinating cultural and physical environments on earth. Travel through this region of the Indian Himalaya is quite safe. Our experienced, local guides will take us to remote areas to visit ancient monasteries (still active), meet villagers practicing traditional customs, and travel with the nomadic life of yak herders.

During this 14-day photography seminar, experience Himalayan life almost as it was 100 years ago. In the process, learn to become a better photographer with the insight of visual anthropologist and former National Geographic photographer Dr. William Thompson, along with advertising and art photographer Sarah Waters, a two-year veteran of exploration of Ladakhi culture and landscapes.

Participants will learn to create images that tell stories in the context of interacting intimately with the various cultures we encounter, including the opportunity to capture the disappearing nomadic lifestyle of Tibetan yak herders.

We will stay in Guest Houses in Leh, with villagers in home-stays, and camp (comfortably) with nomadic herders. We will travel to remote areas through breath-takingly beautiful, pristine landscapes, through valleys and mountain passes, from 11,000 feet to 16,000 feet.

The Goal

Photographically, at the end of the 12-day course, each participant will become competent in photography skills and be able to **create meaningful imagery that tells stories.**

Allow the vastness of the breath-taking Himalayan landscape to inspire you as we travel to high elevations. Observe ancient traditions and culture in an environment that lends itself to reflection and meditation. (Our guide practices yoga daily.) Most importantly, **learn to make images — using your heart and your brain.** Capture how **you** see the world, not how someone teaches you to see it.

As William Thompson often says, **“Cameras don’t take pictures — people do.”**

We will explore the vast number of extraordinary Buddhist Monasteries that populate the high Himalaya, many that have been around for a thousand years.

We will high-grade and explore the most fascinating aspects of Ladakh. Photograph in Muslim villages. Visit camel herders. Touch life, and, to an extent, live in the lives of the Ladakhi people.



The Backdrop

For the last 8 years, William Thompson has traveled extensively in the Himalayan regions of Ladakh and Zaskar, trekking, exploring, photographing the disappearing culture. Along with his colleague Sarah Waters, they have dug deeply into the remote, interesting, and marvelous arenas of Himalayan culture and geography. With a PhD in cultural anthropology and a 12-year career as a National Geographic photographer, William’s contribution is to help each participant rise to a very high level of photographic competence, as well as to simply experience the enormously dense and fascinating culture milieu — an in-depth photographic skill development in the context of a complex cultural context.

Sarah encourages people to see beyond what is front of them, and, following William’s philosophy, to take the time to “feel and capture” the emotion of subjects.

This seminar is an opportunity to visit, interact with, and to understand and appreciate Himalayan life that is in the midst of tremendous change.

Aside from the dense cultural landscape, Ladakh and Zaskar have some of the most incomparable physical landscapes on earth.

Simply, nothing exists elsewhere like these stunning alpine mountains and valleys. There are no words to adequately describe how one feels while standing in the vastness, embraced by the beauty.



The Details

The course begins in Leh, Ladakh, a one-hour flight from Delhi. The first few days are invested in exploring the historic areas around Leh and visiting monasteries, while becoming acclimatized to the 11,000-foot altitude. Adjusting to the altitude is critical before we begin the adventure to the higher elevations of our travels.

Each day, we will discuss details of photography; specifically, **creating stories with images**. As a group, we will review images and work towards improvement. In the evenings, depending on the length of the day's outing, each participant's images will be reviewed on a monitor and critiqued in a learning context. (Not mandatory.) Or, we might end up at a Tibetan restaurant drinking Ladakhi beer. Both, important activities.

The seminar offers a healthy mix of learning to make meaningful images; appreciating other cultures and environments; how personal reflection translates into your image-making (heart and brain); and great adventure, and great FUN — all, while exploring the best of Ladakh and Zaskar.



The Schedule

Leh is our home base. After each exploration, we will return to our comfortable guest house in Leh, reorganize, review our work, then we are off to equally enthralling parts of this fascinating country. Visits to small villages include “home-stays”. Home-stays are a delightful way to come to know and understand Ladakhi life, and on a very personal level. Other times, we will camp in comfortable tents set up for us in advance of arrival.

We will travel to the **Nubra Valley**, driving over the Khardung La (18000 feet)— one of, if not THE highest roadway passes in the world. In the Nubra Valley, we will see camels. We will interact with the Muslim culture of Ladakh, which is very different from the Buddhist culture represented throughout much of Ladakh and Zaskar.

We will follow the **Indus River**, one of the largest rivers in the world, and we will follow the deep-cut **Shyok and Nubra River Valleys**. The latter offer tremendous, and accessible, scenery with green oasis villages surrounded by thrillingly stark scree slopes, boulder fields, and harsh, arid, **stunning mountains up to 25,000 feet** rising above the valleys. The inhabitants in Nubra are Balti, speak the Balti language, and are Shia and Sufia Nurbakhshia Muslims.

We will return to Leh, measure our photographic progress, and regroup. We then travel to one of the most **remote parts of an incredible landscape** where we will camp near Tibetan yak and goat herders. We will visit with and photograph the nomadic herders who exist in a disappearing culture. It is doubtful that these nomads living in yak hair tents will be free to wander much longer, as the modern world encroaches, threatening their centuries-old traditions and livelihoods.

These isolated areas of Ladakh host a very different, and **massive grassland landscape, with gorgeous blue lakes at 16,000 feet**. It is simply impossible to describe this environment — so very gorgeous and so incredibly awe-inspiring.



Photography

Sarah and William work with everyone each day during the seminar. William is very much a part of the group and is there to lend help at many levels. We also have a guide/translator with us for the majority of the course to assist and provide insights to our observations.

Additionally, William is available before the course to answer any questions about equipment, the culture, or anything else related to the trip or travel to India.

Camera equipment

The fact is that any camera works because the bottom line is that cameras do not take pictures; people do. **To see with the mind and heart** is what we try and develop. In previous years, students have made incredible photos using only an iPhone. Regardless of your skill level, we will help you learn to create meaningful images.

Dr. Thompson created a [video](#) for a class he taught in India for Quest University Canada, using an inexpensive Sony point and shoot in order to illustrate that it is NOT about cameras, rather it is about perception. Learning to observe. To be patient. To use your heart and brain to capture 'the' moment..



Safety

As noted, Leh is super safe and, in fact, all of Ladakh and Zaskar is safe. We will visit one of the safest places on earth.

Each participant should see a **physician who specializes in foreign travel** for advisement of meds to take with you (for high altitudes) and immunizations, including tetanus.

Because of the altitude there are no mosquitoes and, thus, no malaria.

Bottled water will be available at no cost for the entire 14-day trip.

The one issue that concerns everyone is the **high altitude**. This is the reason we stay around Leh for the first few days, to allow everyone to **acclimatize** before departing on our travels. We recommend that you come to Leh a few days early in order to give the body as much time as possible to acclimatize to the altitude. Guest House rooms can be arranged for those who choose to come early.

We carry with us an oxygen saturation meter to be clear on how each participant is functioning at any altitude.



The Cost

The cost for the 12-day photo-seminar is **\$5,800**, exclusive of airfare (if booked before March 31st the fee drops by 300.00). The cost **includes** all in-country transportation, lodging, meals, and guides. **Not included** is airfare, laundry (super inexpensive), liquor, taxis, and tips. You will be met at the airport and from that point, you are in our care...no worries.

Additional:

Airfare into Leh is not included. Estimated fare can range from \$1,200 to \$2,100, depending on how soon you book your flights and, of course, flight origin. Feel free to contact us with questions.

Tourist visa for India is required.

Rescue insurance is required - there is **only one company** that we suggest you use and it is **GlobalRescue.com** .

Gratuities: Our support staff is rewarded with gratuities which are determined by our host company.

A Note from William Thompson

This is simply a primer for what to expect. We explore wondrous places that few people ever see. - the opportunity for adventure is unbelievable. The opportunity for image making is enormous. The world is becoming transparent with travel dollars often exceeding the GNP of some countries. Sadly, with each visit, I have witnessed in Ladakh and Zaskar the disappearing of many of these pristine life styles - cultures existing for hundreds of years are "modernizing" little by little.

Seven years of trekking and exploring has provided an insight to these kinds of special places and I would love to share them with you.

For additional information, or if you are interested in viewing additional information or photographs from previous excursions, please contact William or Sarah.

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Sarah Waters

This will be Sarah's third year exploring Ladakh and Zanskar. She immerses herself in the local culture, while thoughtfully documenting the daily lives of the people of India's high Himalaya and their proud, time-honored traditions.

Simply said, Sarah is in love with Ladkah and Zanskar and is eager to return and share her experiences with participants.

Sarah is a third-generation photographer (her father was instrumental in pioneering the career of Ansel Adams) and she cannot imagine doing anything else. Her approach to photography is to wait for the light, to capture the moments with depth, with authenticity.

Aside from her world as a high-level advertising and art photographer, she is also a true explorer.

Her best attribute: she listens. Sarah is super thoughtful, insightful, and is a joy to have on these wonderfully creative adventures.

You will love working with, and learning from Sarah.

William Thompson

William is a former, 12-year veteran National Geographic photographer. The highlights: the only complete aerial of Mt Everest; the Heart of the Himalaya; the Kathmandu Valley; Bhutan; Costa Rica; and a two-year stint chasing elephants around the world.

William also has a successful career as a commercial photographer and film director. His many clients include Marlboro, Wells Fargo, and a myriad of high-profile clients spanning more than 20 years.

Growing from his educational background as a PhD anthropologist, William's passion now is to edify and build a substantial record, via film, of the disappearing cultures and languages such that future generations can visually touch the world that he is lucky enough to explore and record.

