

Snow Leopard Expedition in Upper Mustang



Trip Overview

The Snow Leopard Expedition in Upper Mustang is a 14-day high-altitude adventure designed for wildlife enthusiasts and Himalayan explorers. Focused on spotting the elusive snow leopard, blue sheep, Himalayan wolves, and high-altitude birds, this journey combines rugged trekking with cultural immersion.

Guests traverse the trans-Himalayan landscapes of Mustang, from the arid cliffs and barley fields around Samar and Ghiling to the walled city of Lo-Manthang; all while guided by expert naturalists and local spotters. Evenings are spent observing from high ridges with thermal scopes, offering unparalleled opportunities to witness wildlife in its natural habitat. The expedition also highlights the rich Tibetan Buddhist heritage, with visits to monasteries, mani walls, and traditional villages, providing a unique blend of nature and culture.

Total Trip Days: 13 Nights/ 14 Days

Trip Highlights

- Trek through the restricted Upper Mustang region, home to the snow leopard and blue sheep
- High-ridge wildlife observation sessions with thermal scopes guided by expert local spotters
- Experience traditional Tibetan culture in Lo-Manthang, Tsarang, and Kagbeni
- Scenic flights connecting Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Jomsom, showcasing Himalayan panoramas
- Opportunities to spot Tibetan wolves, Himalayan foxes, snow finches, chukar, and snowcock
- Stay in comfortable lodges and guesthouses that blend local culture with modern amenities
- Insight into conservation efforts and local ecological knowledge from naturalists and ACAP staff
- Unique combination of high-altitude trekking, wildlife observation, and cultural immersion in one of Nepal's most remote regions

Itinerary

Day 1:

You arrive in Kathmandu and are welcomed to a boutique heritage hotel in the heart of the city. In the evening, your expedition naturalist provides a briefing on Nepal's high-altitude ecosystems and the elusive snow leopard, one of the most iconic yet secretive predators of the Himalaya. Over dinner, you receive a detailed overview of the journey ahead.

Day 2:

After breakfast, you take a short scenic flight to Pokhara, Nepal's beautiful lake city framed by the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges. The day is reserved for acclimatization and preparation, including a visit to the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) office for permits and an introduction to the conservation challenges in Mustang and Annapurna.

Day 3:

A thrilling mountain flight takes you to Jomsom, gateway to Upper Mustang. From here, you drive along the Kali Gandaki gorge to Kagbeni, a medieval village guarding the entrance to the restricted Mustang Valley. After settling into your lodge, you take a short acclimatization hike along the windswept ridges, scanning for Himalayan griffon vultures and lammergeiers circling above.

Day 4:

Your first trekking day leads through arid trans-Himalayan landscapes of ochre cliffs, scattered juniper, and barley fields. The trail to Samar offers chances to spot herds of blue sheep—the primary prey of snow leopards. Their presence increases your anticipation as you venture deeper into snow leopard territory.

Day 5:

Over the next two days you trek and stay near the village of Ghiling. This highland zone is prime habitat for snow leopards. Early morning and late evening scanning sessions, guided by local spotters who have grown up in these mountains, are dedicated to finding signs of the “ghost of the Himalaya.” You may observe scrapes, scent marks, and pugmarks along ridgelines. Meanwhile, sightings of Tibetan partridge, chukar, and Himalayan snowcock enliven the days.

Day 7:

The route winds past ancient mani walls and cliff-side caves to Tsarang, a historic monastery town. Here, your guides explain the deep interlink between Buddhist culture and wildlife conservation. At night, you set out on a high-ridge observation post with thermal scopes, hoping for your first glimpse of a snow leopard under the star-filled sky.

Day 8:

The capital of Mustang, Lo-Manthang, becomes your base for two days of wildlife exploration. Morning hikes take you into remote side valleys where blue sheep, Tibetan wolves, and Himalayan foxes roam. In the evenings, you return to Lo-Manthang’s walled city to immerse yourself in its monastic culture. The mix of wildlife and heritage here is unparalleled, giving you a rare balance of natural and cultural discovery.

Day 10:

Your days are spent on extended excursions to the high ridges near Namgyal and Choser, scanning cliffs and scree slopes with spotting scopes. This is where the highest likelihood of observing a snow leopard arises. Even if the

cat itself remains elusive, the combination of stark landscapes, flocks of Tibetan snowfinches, and herds of blue sheep grazing against snow-capped backdrops offers profound rewards.

Day 12:

Retracing your steps, you trek down through Mustang's dramatic canyons, taking in your final wildlife encounters. By evening you arrive back in Jomsom, where you share a celebratory dinner with your team, reflecting on the extraordinary landscapes traversed and the unforgettable moments of searching for one of the world's rarest cats.

Day 13:

A morning flight returns you first to Pokhara, and then onwards to Kathmandu. The rest of the day is free for relaxation or shopping for Himalayan handicrafts. In the evening, a special farewell dinner celebrates the spirit of Himalayan exploration.

Day 14:

You depart Nepal with cherished memories of high-altitude trekking, Tibetan culture, and the quiet thrill of snow leopard country. Whether you saw the elusive predator or only its signs, you have walked through landscapes where few travelers venture, carrying with you an intimate connection to the Himalaya.