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3 Idiots can't be wrong - Visiting Ladakh after a successful indian movie -

Fully dressed as a bride Pia rode her bike at the shores of Pangong lake towards „Rancho“ Phuntsok Wangdu – and thousands of Indians followed her. Remote Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas enjoyed a sudden rise in number of domestic tourists (55.642 in 2010 compared to 40.517 in 2009) due to the famous movie „3 Idiots“, which climax scenes were shot at beautiful Pangong lake at 4.200 m. Millions watched the movie and many were curious to watch themselves the wonderland of barren high altitude desert. So lets see, what they discovered.

After 1,5 hrs. most scenic flight from Delhi to the capital of Ladakh, Leh, one gets off the plane – and gasps for air. Not only because of breathtaking landscape of high mountains dotted with small incredibly green hamlets and villages, but also because of lack of oxygen due to location at 3.500 m above sealevel. One should strictly obey the recommended 24 hrs complete rest to acclimatize the body. But that is not a big deal as in Lehs numerous cosy hotels which welcome their guests with the ladakhi warmth of hospitality. They offer nice sitting areas in the garden or rooftop-restaurants with a spectacular view over Indus Valley topped by snowcovered 6.120 m peak of Stok Kangri.

After a relaxing day in Leh one is ready to set off for exploring some of the 400 buddhist monasteries and nunneries, called gompa and chomoling. Their white walls with the dark red painted Gonkhang (room of the forceful deities) are greeting the visitor mostly from far away sight as they are nestled on small hilltops like eagles nests overlooking the village. Some are hidden in midst of villages and some are so small that there is only one monk in charge. But all of them contain treasures of buddhist artefacts and wisdom inherited since centuries after Rinchen Zangpo settled the tibetan buddhism in Ladakh 1.000 years ago. As buddhism teaches its scholars to be critical with the texts and proof everything what is taught, it goes well together with the message of the 3-idiots-movie.

Enough of gompa-hopping? Then one could start with the adventurous trip to Pangong lake. A 6 hrs. drive on rough road over 3rd highest pass of Ladakh, the Chang-la at 5.288 m, gets the visitor overwhelmed by the first glimpse of this turquoise gem in the middle of nowhere. When approaching closer, the location of the finishing scene of the 3-idiots-movie can easily be spotted. And indeed – what a place! Inmidst of barren landscape with just rocks and sand in all shades of pastell-colours lies this huge 135 km long lake, visited by some migratory birds as the bar-headed goose and the brahmin duck. But also some villages dot the south coast, having their farmland for growing barley and grazing their yaks and Dzos along irrigation systems from the melting glacier waters. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Pangong belong to Tibet, making it a delicate area for tourism. Until 2009 it was only allowed to visit one village just at the western tip of the lake, Spanmik, but in 2010 another 20 km further east were opened to visitors. Now the villages of Man and Merak with their small population leading a simple life in harmony with the harsh nature in their centuries old traditional ways. Despite this hard life with many winter-months temperatures dropping below minus 20°C the Ladakhis keep an inner happiness which one gets easily attracted by the „Jullay Jullay“ smiles out of deeply wrinkled faces.

We guess that Pia can't resist neither this amazing landscape nor these friendly people nor her charming love „Rancho“ Phuntsok Wangdu and will lead a happy life after the happy-end of the movie. And for sure the tourist will go home with a pack of happy memories from this special part of big mother India.