

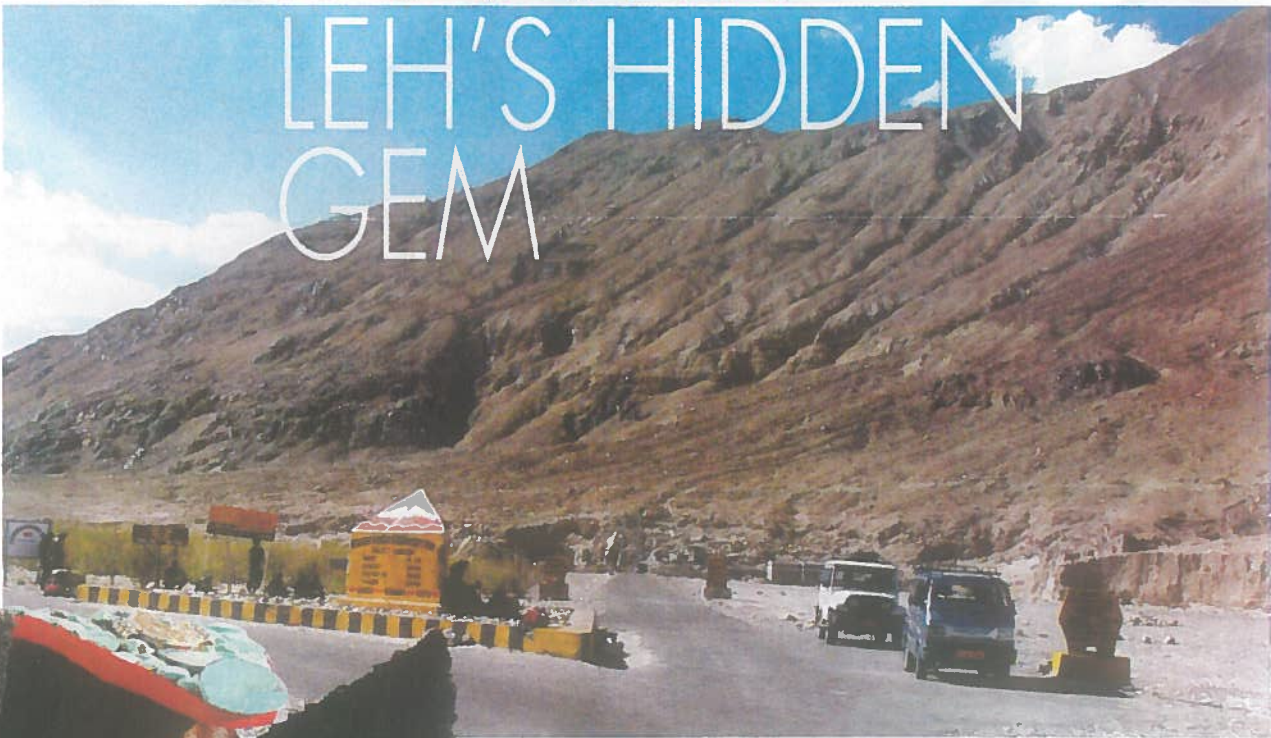


Curing sulphur springs on the road to Siachen.

By Murli Menon

PANAMIK —

LEH'S HIDDEN GEM



After spending three weeks at Leh, I came to know about the sulphur springs at Panamik, which offered miraculous cures for arthritis, digestive ailments and skin diseases. As I was already planning to visit Dikshit and Hunder, I decided to spend a week at Panamik, to study the miraculous effects of these hot water springs. Moreover, I was planning a trek along the ancient Silk Route, which passed through Panamik and Dikshit.

Panamik is situated approximately 140 km. from Leh, on the Leh-

Siachen route. However, as the drive from Leh to Panamik, crosses the Khardung-La pass, this journey could take four to six hours depending on the weather, landslides or condition of roads. We started from Leh at 7 a.m. and reached Panamik at 12:30 p.m. We drove at a leisurely pace and stopped at many places en route to click digital pictures of nature's wonders. We checked into Hiker's Hut at Panamik, which would be my home for the next seven days. It is a simple room with comfortable beds, an attached bathroom with 24 hours hot water (an underground sulphur spring crisscrosses this Hut,



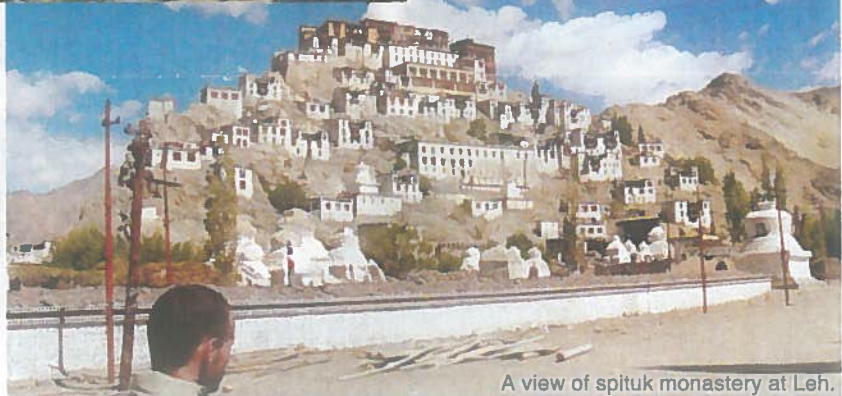
providing the rooms with natural heating throughout the year and hot mineral water flows through all the taps at all times.)

For a vegan like me, who drinks 10 to 20 cups of green jasmine tea (without milk) per day, it was a dream come true. Take some boiling hot water directly from the tap into a large cup. Dip the green tea bag into the water – and you have an instant cup of hot green tea! I carried lots of notebooks, pens, meditation tapes, ZeNLP music for relaxation, a walkman, digital camera, torch, assorted dry fruits, green tea, a box of candles, several boxes of safety matches, cotton earplugs and several sets of AA and AAA batteries, in my rucksack.

SULPHURIC MIRACLE

My objective at Panamik was to start writing the manuscript of my second book titled *ZeNLP-the power to relax*, which is due for publication shortly. I also wanted to re-examine my physical, mental and spiritual goals and write down my short-and long-term goals, and design an action plan to implement after getting back to civil society.

Shirin, my local contact at Panamik, extolled the medicinal properties of the sulphur springs at Panamik. The Chinese Turks or Yerkendis stopped over at Panamik



A view of spituk monastery at Leh.

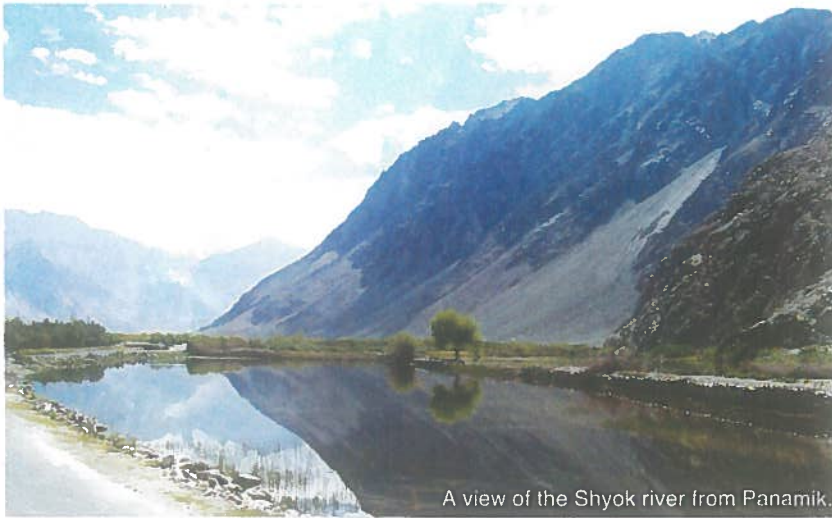
for a night's rest, as their caravans passed through the ancient Silk Route. The hot water at Panamik was a known cure for arthritis, acidity and stomach ailments since ancient times. Miraculous cures were reported by patients who thronged these sulphur springs from places as far away as Chinese Turkistan, Tibet and China and Afghanistan.

The medicinal benefits of the hot water at Panamik are numerous. For stomach ailments, patients were asked to collect one litre of pure, boiling hot water at dawn. They were asked to drink this water after it became lukewarm. Immediately after consuming the water, they were asked to climb a nearby mountain barefoot and descend the same at a faster pace. Once the patient made a slow ascent and quick descent, he would start feeling giddy and begin to vomit. It was believed that all the

toxins accumulated in the digestive system over the years, are ejected by the stomach along with the vomit. This was the ancient process of detoxifying the stomach naturally. I tried this procedure twice during my stay at Panamik, and found immediate improvement in my ability to digest.

Even to this day, Ladakhi women all over Leh, visit Panamik to take a bath in these hot water springs, as it is a miraculous cure for postmenopausal women, suffering from joint pains. Old men and women with severe arthritis are escorted into the bathrooms, but manage to walk out on their own steam, after the hot water bath.

But experiencing is believing. After drinking endless cups of green sulphur tea, I started vomiting every morning. I could see all the oil, poisons, phlegm, mucous, bile and



A view of the Shyok river from Panamik.

other impurities in my body coming out of my system. The hot water bath at dusk used to put me to peaceful sleep with vivid dreams. I continued my ZeNLP-guided meditations throughout my stay. My mornings started with music for relaxation, a healthy breakfast of boiled garden fresh vegetables, green tea and fresh walnuts. Lunch consisted of potatoes roasted over a bonfire outside the Hut. There are several short treks around Panamik, which can be taken. It is advisable to let a local guide accompany you to the higher peaks.

Nubra Valley is the home of the Leh berry and September is the berry collection season. One can pick up berries from the countless trees that dot the landscape all over the valley. The fruit is slightly bitter in taste but juicy. It is an ideal energy booster during long treks over otherwise barren terrain. The other unique feature of the Nubra Valley is that it is home to the double-humped Bactrian camel. But one has to spend a day in the dunes to actually sight one.

The return trip from Panamik to Leh took five hours. But every minute spent on the journey was a wise investment, as the week spent at Panamik, cleansed my body, mind and soul completely. My mind felt fresh, body felt more energetic and soul felt lighter after spending a week at nature's own spa, high among the Himalayan peaks that protect our borders.

How to get there: Indian Airlines operates daily flights to Leh from New Delhi, Srinagar and Jammu.

The to and fro drive from Leh to Hunder costs approximately Rs 2500 by jeep.

Shared taxis are available on the return trip to Leh (Rs 500 per seat).

Permits: Inner line permits are needed for Indian as well as foreign nationals to enter Nubra Valley and have to be obtained from the district collector's office in advance. Obtain them as soon as you land at Leh. Identification documents come in handy at Indian Army check-posts at Khardung.

An inner line permit for four weeks enabled me to visit Panamik, Hunder, Dikshit and Siachen base camp comfortably, including the to and fro travel. My Government of Gujarat driving License was checked at all border check-posts during my eight-week stay at Leh. Inner line permits are issued in two to three working days.

Where to stay: JKTDC Moonland Guest House at Leh, adjacent to the airport is a comfortable place.

The Hiker's Hut at Hunder offers minimum but clean and comfortable rooms.

Contact Urgain Loondup dy. director tourism, Leh or Ashok Raina at JKTDC, New Delhi for bookings.

Where to eat: There are very few pure vegetarian joints at Leh or Panamik. At Leh, the Punjabi *dhaba* opposite New Bus Stand offers good Jammu *rajma* with *rice*. Pure vegetarians are advised to carry their own foodstuffs to Hunder, unless they can subsist on almonds, apricots, walnuts, apples, carrots and green tea. The caretaker of Hikers Hut can whip up simple meals if the ingredients can be purchased and given to them. Fresh cabbage, cauliflower, potatoes and onions are available from the farms around Nubra Valley.

How to plan your itinerary for Leh: Fly into Leh, Allow two days for acclimatisation. Drink lots of fluids. Sleep for at least 10 hours per day. Visit the local markets on the third day. Apply for inner line permits on this day.

Visit Magnet Hill and Nimu (25 km.) on a day-long excursion on the fourth day. Drive down to Pangong Lake through Changla Pass on the fifth day. Stay overnight at Pangong Lake.

Visit Spituk monastery at Leh on the sixth day.

Spend the Sunday shopping or the eating out at Leh on the seventh day.

Drive down to Hunder on the eighth day. Stay overnight at Hunder. Trek to Lobang Tso next day.

Spend a day at Dikshit on the ninth day.

Proceed to Panamik on the tenth day. Enjoy the sulphur springs on the eleventh day.

Drive back to Leh on the twelfth day. Last-minute shopping the next day.

Fly back to Delhi on the fourteenth day.

Other precautions:

Carry extra sets of AAA batteries for digital cameras. There are frequent power-cuts at Panamik. Extra candles, matchboxes and torches come in handy. There are few shops after crossing Dikshit. Vaseline is needed throughout the year.

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