

# PANGONGTSO – LADAKH'S BLUE DIAMOND

A divine body of water. By Murli Menon

PangongTso Lake.



The sheer beauty of Mother Nature.

**T**he experience of landing at Moonland tourist bungalow – my home at Leh for three weeks – sums up the landscape. Landing at Leh airport and walking down to this traditional Ladakhi guest house, a kilometre away, was similar to what the first astronauts to the moon may have experienced. Large tracts of barren land, craggy rocks and mountains stretching from one end of the horizon to the other. The chilly September morning greeted us and the endless warm cups of black tea herbal infusion, prepared by Mohammed Rasool, the caretaker of the JKTDC tourist bungalow, where I stayed, was the nectar, I needed throughout my stay in Ladakh.

My objectives at Leh were to address co-ordinators and teachers of the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* on *Learning can be fun* and *High altitude stress management through ZeNLP*

(a combination of Zen meditation and neuro-linguistic programming). Being a strict vegan (no animal products including wool, leather, meat, milk, milk products or eggs), I planned to face the biting cold with *Sambhalpuri kurtas*, *khadi jackets* and cotton earplugs. I also planned some high-altitude solo treks, armed with apricots, walnuts and assorted dry fruits. I also carried herbs (for making herbal infusion). Only biodegradable stuff would accompany me on this eco-tourism trek. My meditation tapes, Walkman and camera were neatly packed into my rucksack.

I did several short and long treks all over Ladakh but the trek around PangongTso lake made me experience the power of nature. This long and narrow lake is near the Chushul mountains on the Indo-Tibet border. *Pangong* means concave in Ladakhi. The azure waters of this huge lake are cold, clear and salty. There are lots of minerals at the

basin of this lake. The bottom of this lake can be seen as the water is crystal clear. PangongTso is 150 km. in length and 4 km. wide. Nearly half of this lake lies in Tibet and is situated 160 km from Leh.

## LIFETIME EXPERIENCE

We rose early and started our Jeep safari at 7 a.m. The journey was as pleasurable as the destination. The 160 km drive took us through the villages of Karu, Tangste and Lukung. We crossed the world's third highest pass, Changla (17,250 feet), *en route* to Pangong (14,350 feet). Every photograph we clicked *en route* resembled a picture post card. The only animals we encountered were yaks. We played soothing ZeNLP music for relaxation throughout this seven-hour drive over rugged terrain. The first glimpse of PangongTso, from miles away was a very divine and spiritual experience. A speck of deep blue amidst sand dunes, rocks and stone. It resembled a blue diamond nestling in the palm of Nature's hand. The closer we got to the lake, the more beautiful it looked. We finally arrived at the shores of this mini-ocean and it was our moment of enlightenment at the end of a pilgrimage.

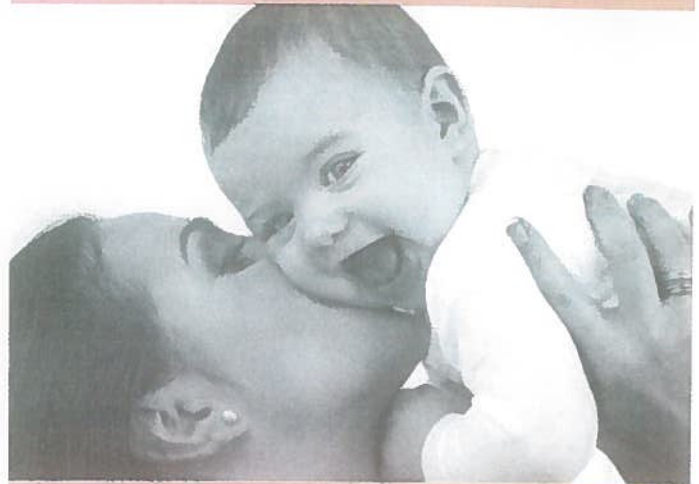
A drop of the ocean was encompassed between natural pyramids of sandstone. The long trek along the shores of this lake is a geologist's dream. Shiny stones, natural gems, crystals, smooth pebbles, rocks, slates and amethysts decorated the banks of this water goddess. I collected as many of these treasures as possible as souvenirs. But the most fascinating phenomenon that awaited us was the changing colours of the lake during the day. From azure to aquamarine to greenish blue to green to purple and violet, the colours of this majestic water body changed with every passing hour. The long boat ride on the placid waters of this ocean of tranquility calmed my body, mind and soul. The return journey took only five hours but a visit to Pangong lake is a once in a lifetime experience and the investment in the journey was worthwhile, considering that every moment spent was meditation in the truest sense. Ladakh is an ideal destination for my next stress- management workshop.

**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 Pangong Lake costs approximately 4000 by Jeep.

**Where to stay:** JKDC Moonland Tourist Bungalow at Leh, adjacent to the airport is a comfortable place to stay. Contact Mr Urgain Lundup, Deputy Director-Tourism, JK Tourism, Leh or Mr. G. M. Kakpori at JKTDC, New Delhi, for bookings.

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