



## acclimatization for adults and children

ladakh, the land of high passes, of pristine beauty, and fortress-like buddhist monasteries, is an extraordinary holiday destination. this high-altitude region offers so much, and domestic as well as international travellers come here to explore a unique holiday. the average altitude of more than 3,500 metres, however, demands some preparations so that the body adjustment can be a successful one for both adults and children.

in this article, the author is sharing with you some easy precautions as well as few hints to meet the altitude, so that you can enjoy a journey to ladakh, or any other himalayan destination.

### **the journey starts in your mind**

it is important that we, no matter wether travelling individually or with our kid(s), keep an attentive and open mind. we often have the tendency to think too much, right? this leads to sorrows which result in a negative decision making. carelessness, on the other hand, is no option either. therefore, we have to try to find a good balance between a positive attitude and a «healthy» respect in front of the high altitude.

### **preparations before the journey**

when embarking to any destination, some arrangements have to be done, like checking the own travel insurance, procuring the necessary visa, organizing the packing, etc. but besides the administrative and practical preparations, there is also a possible physical preparation that can be done, for example:

#### a) get/stay fit and healthy

a healthy life-style is essential, not only for travelling. however, if you are planning to do a trekking (or mountaineering tour) in ladakh, a (very) good constitution is an absolute must. people with pulmonary diseases, heart problems or any serious injury to their body (back, neck, knees) should consult their doctor before undertaking any booking to himalayan regions.

people coming to ladakh already having influenza symptoms or a cold will face more difficulties to adapt to the altitude. our experiences have shown that these visitors often spend the first few days to get better before they can start to undertake any activities in ladakh.

#### b) regular hikes in the mountains

does your timetable allow you to visit the mountains before travelling to ladakh? super, then you should take this advantage and for a few weekends enjoy walks in the mountains, preferably at 2,500 metres and higher. visitors whose last visit has been done shortly before their departure often had an easier acclimatization.

c) sessions in pressure chambers

previously reserved for research purposes only, the session in pressure chambers is now available for common people with the adequate financial means, too. this is useful only when done shortly before the trip.

### **flight travel vs. road journey to ladakh**

what is better for acclimatization: shall we fly to ladakh or arrive first by road? this is a question we were regularly encountered with. it is too tough of a trip coming by road first. most of our clients doing so were struggling because the journey was long, they were tired, and additionally had to cope with their acclimatization to the altitude.

we therefore propose: firstly, fly into ladakh in the most direct way possible, acclimatize, and do your program here. when your schedule allows it, you can leave ladakh by road to manali, delhi, and then fly back home. we are sure that in this way, your memories of the entire journey will stay positively and for a long time in your mind.

### **follow some simple rules after arrival**

flying into ladakh means that you will reach leh early in the morning. this little city with approximately 30,000 inhabitants lies on an altitude of about 3,500 metres. you may will feel not well rested because of the long journey from home, so relax in your room or even take a short nap during the morning. try to walk a little (no climbs!) after a light lunch, eg. in the main market, do get some easy exercise. go to bed in good time so that your body gets a good night's rest.

just doing «nothing» after arrival, is quite difficult, agreed. most of us want to explore the surroundings, right? which is ok if done conciously and calmly. concentrate on your breath, and listen to your body. you will find out what suits you and what does not. if you are travelling with your little ones, keep a watchful eye on them, too, to see how they react to the altitude.

it is also important, that you and your family members drink a lot. water, tea, preferably with little sugar or honey, and soups should be consumed in good quantity. your intake should reach at least two litres daily, and please do check the quantity. in this way, your body receives enough liquids and electrolites.

oxygen is equal important, so sitting around in the accommodation is not really an alternative. walk around, slowly and steady, and try to breathe as deeply as possible. sleeping during the night with your upper body little elevated or with open window might help, too.

additionally, do keep an eye on your diet the first two to three days. avoid fried things, meat, eggs, and diary products, as they are too heavy to digest. please remember that your body already has to adapt to the altitude and is quite busy with it. do not put it additionally under pressure with digestion problems.

should you or any of your family members feel to vomit, please do not feel ashamed of doing so. vomitting releases pressure in your body, besides that it does get rid of something that your body does not accept, and you will feel relief afterwards. same actually applies also to farting or passing stool.

## **what are you doing next?**

congratulations, you have successfully accomplished your acclimatization. what are your next plans? a sightseeing tour, a trekking, or even an expedition? then you should book an experienced guide. he or she – meanwhile, there are also women guiding – will hopefully ask how you are doing. the reason behind this is not just manners, but (s)he wants to know how you are actually coping with the altitude. so, do not hesitate to mention how you are really feeling. (s)he can give you important hints, and in case you need it, bring you to the next doctor or health facility.

## **travelling with children**

we have seen that families travelling with kids show reservations in booking travels in high altitudes. this is understandable, but honestly, we think the parents' worries are not really justified. our experience has shown that a children's body generally adapts better, or faster to the altitude than their parents'.

if you are travelling with a toddler older than three months, please make sure that you observe your little one very closely so that you can react accordingly in case it is necessary. during take-off and landing, give him/her the bottle or the soother to help him/her with the adjustment of the pressure. once in ladakh, keep the baby warm at any time, and do not expose it to the sun without proper protection (hat, sunglasses, sun cream).

sometimes, teenagers face troubles while adapting to the height. we assume it is so because their bodies are slowly entering into a new phase as they are passing from child- into adulthood.

## **last but not least**

if you or your family members need specific medicines, please keep in mind to bring enough of them for the entire journey. in case of minor ailments, there are several pharmacies you can contact.

the doctors and medical staff in ladakh are competent in treating altitude-related problems. in case you should not feel well or have symptoms of acute mountain sickness, they can help you. this is the case, too, if you or somebody else of the family should generally feel unwell.

one last thing we would like to mention: in our more than twenty years of experience in the travel industry, we have encountered more than three thousand travellers with different attitudes, preferences, interests, and mindsets. out of these only a few guests had to be flown out of leh due to altitude problems. you see, the amount of guests flown out constitute a very tiny percentage which is actually below zero.

about the editor:

the italian cristina martinelli grew up in switzerland where she worked in the marketing and humanitarian aid sectors. she is living permanently in the village of phyang, ladakh, since several years. during the tourist season, she and her ladakhi husband tashi are managing a travel agency and their guesthouse. with their 5 year-old son they are travelling regularly to europe to visit family members and friends, and are faced with acclimatization every time they come back to ladakh.